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## Swami Dayanand Saraswati: Social and Religious Philosophy

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Swami Dayanand Saraswati is world famous as a great scholar of Veda Shastras, social reformer and promoter of Arya Samaj. He was the first person of this era, who legislated for compulsory education for all and implemented it by making a revolutionary declaration of equal right to education for human beings. He is the first Indian who propounded the principle of equality of man and equal opportunity for all in the modern era. A new era in the development of Indian nationalism begins with the religious and social reform movements of the 19th century. At this time the society was polluted by evils such as Sati Pratha, Caste system, Child Marriage, idol worship, untouchability etc. At this time, due to the propaganda being done by Christian missionaries, people's attention was getting attracted towards Christianity and they were becoming indifferent towards Hinduism. At this time there was a renaissance in the country and various reformers made many improvements in the social and religious condition of the country, due to which the construction of modern India was encouraged. Swami ji enlightened the glorious past of India and inspired the countrymen to rise above their exploited condition and move towards the future. Swami Dayanand Saraswati got more fame as a social reformer than in any other field. Swami Dayanand's first main task towards social reform was to oppose untouchability. Swami ji believed that in the absence of proper education, all-round development of any country cannot be possible. Swami ji emphasized on the character building of the youth and taught them the lesson of true illegal fearlessness. Swami ji used to emphasize on the upliftment of the entire human race in his social thoughts, he also supported the Vedic ashram system. Swami Dayanand considered education important in the context of the unity of the country and rendered the fact that Hindi language must be prevalent in the whole country to unite the country in the thread of unity. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was in favor of compulsory education. He emphasized on adopting such an education system which is completely national and which produces such citizens who have a sense of duty and responsibility towards the society. Swami Dayanand was not only a religious reformer, he also felt acutely the political plight of India's subjugation. Dayanand was the first to raise the voice that self rule should be established in India by ending foreign rule. According to Swami Dayanand, Vedas are the only evidence to know the truth. Whatever is according to the Vedas is true and whatever is against the Vedas is

untrue. According to him, religion cannot be many because God is one, therefore religion is also one. Swami Dayanand believed in such a religion which is universal and whose principles are accepted as truth by all human beings. Swami Dayanand gave a liberal interpretation of religion and emphasized on one God.

**Keywords:** Equality, Propaganda, Religion, Reformer, Liberal, Upliftment, Untouchability

### **Introduction:**

The 19th century has the honor of being the renaissance period of India. Many saints, social reformers and thinkers were born in India in this century and gave a new direction to the Indian society. In this period, when there was a lot of despair in the Indian society, the practice of casteism, untouchability, evil practices like child marriage were continuously hollowing the Hindu religion, in such a situation, a great social reformer emerged. Created new consciousness and awakening among the people of every section of the society. The name of such a great soul is Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Swami ji enlightened the glorious past of India and inspired the countrymen to rise above their exploited condition and move towards the future. Swami ji not only presented the greatness of Indian culture and Vedas, but realizing the need for Hindu revivalism, he also introduced the countrymen to the dangerous intentions of the British rulers and warned them that if they fall under the spell of British rule. If they come then the downfall of their glorious history and culture will be necessary.

Swami Dayanand was the first Indian who propounded the principle of equal opportunity and equality of human beings in the modern era. A new era in the development of Indian nationalism begins with the religious and social reform movements of the 19th century. At this time the society was polluted by the evils like sati system, caste system, child marriage system, idol worship and untouchability etc. Religion was also becoming narrow due to various ostentation. At this time, due to the propaganda being done by Christian missionaries, people's attention was getting attracted towards Christianity and they were becoming indifferent towards Hinduism. At this time there was a renaissance in the country and various reformers made many improvements in the social and religious condition of the country, due to which the construction of modern India was encouraged.

### **Social thoughts of Swami Dayanand**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati got more fame as a social reformer than in any other field. Swami ji believed in the service of human beings and the entire society. He said that as long as evils and superstitions prevail in the Indian society, political awakening and national integration is not possible in India. Swami ji presented a plan for social reform while presenting serious thoughts on social problems. The description of the social thoughts of Swami Dayanand Saraswati is as follows-

## **Opposition to untouchability**

Swami Dayanand's first main task towards social reform was to oppose untouchability. He was one of the early thinkers who raised his voice against the stigma of untouchability in the society. He was opposed to any such practice in the society which prevented the untouchables from reaching higher social status. Swamiji was of the opinion that no recognition has been given to untouchability in the Vedas. He used to say that if we have to save the Hindu caste, then we have to wash away the stigma of untouchability, it has to be stopped. Swamiji considered untouchability as an inhuman act and considered it the first duty of every Arya Samaj to work against it. Swami ji had also strongly criticized the contractors of Hindu religion for depriving them of education and knowledge of Vedas due to untouchability.

## **Support for improving the status of women**

Swami ji felt that the women of the Hindu society today do not enjoy the same respectable position that they enjoyed in ancient times. He was moved by the pathetic condition of women in the 19th century. Swamiji started the following efforts to improve the condition of women.

Swami ji supported the prohibition of child marriage. He was of the opinion that it is necessary to fix the age of boys and girls for marriage. In order to choose a prudent life partner and to have successful and healthy children, he was of the opinion that at the time of marriage, the age of boys should be at least 25 years and the age of girls should be at least 16 years. Arya Samaj contributed significantly in giving practical shape to the ideas of such social reforms of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. As a result of the efforts of Arya Samaji Har Bilas Sharda of Ajmer, the Sharda Act was passed which legally prohibited child marriage. Har Bilas Sharda was an Arya Samajist, his thoughts were inspired by the thoughts of Swami Dayanand.

Swamiji considered the lack of education responsible for the pathetic condition of women. Swami ji thought that women were deprived of education, so they could not develop themselves. Until women are not educated, the country cannot make all-round development in any way, because we keep half of the society away from their rights.

Swami ji had strongly opposed the purdah system prevalent in the Hindu society. He considered purdah system to be anti-Hindu culture. He was one of the view that until women are not freed from the shackles of purdah, no progress can be expected in the country.

Swami ji has strongly denied the practice of Sati, considering it a cruel inhuman practice. He was of the opinion that after the death of the husband, giving a living district to the woman along with her husband's pyre cannot be justified as a religious and social work in any way.

Swami ji told the system of remarriage of young widows according to the rules of the scriptures and creation. Swami ji was of the opinion that a nation which does not respect women is headed towards destruction.

### **Opposition to caste system**

In the time of Swami Dayanand, the downtrodden had to live in an atmosphere of humiliation and oppression in every sphere of life. They were not recognized as independent beings or personalities in the society, they were considered inferior, they were not allowed to enter the temples, nor were they considered worthy of studying the Vedas. Swamiji called it a hypocritical trap of Pandits and Brahmins. He said that just as God has provided all natural things equally to every human being, similarly Vedas are revealed to all. Swamiji presented a ray of hope to the lower class or downtrodden class by raising his voice against the caste system based on birth. The form of caste system which was prevalent in the present time is not mentioned anywhere in the Vedic society. Swami Dayanand while presenting the ideal of equality in human beings said that no one is untouchable by birth.

### **Opposition to idol worship**

Swami ji has strongly opposed idol worship, he considered idol worship to be against the Vedas. Where is idol worship by Dayanand, there is no authentic and logical basis in the Vedas. Swami ji's idea was that the idol is of physical form from the point of view of its shape, construction element, adornment etc. and it is impossible to attain spiritual concentration. The concept of the life of God in the idol is foolish. Idol worship increases religious ignorance. The devotee devotedly surrenders his consciousness to the idol and his intellect becomes inert. Idol worship divides God and gives rise to touts in the form of priest who use the money earned from devotees for immoral activities.

### **Views Regarding Education**

Swami ji believed that in the absence of proper education, all-round development of any country cannot be possible. Swami ji wanted to improve the society, like a scholar, he considered it appropriate to end the cause of the evils prevalent in the society. There were evils like hypocrisy and idol worship in the society, the reason for all this was superstition, which was flourishing in the society due to ignorance spread due to illiteracy. To end illiteracy, the promotion of education is necessary, through which the Hindu society could get rid of the darkness of ignorance. Swami ji did not consider education to be limited only to the school level, but according to him, education builds the body, cultivates the senses and develops intellectual powers.

Swamiji considered western education and education system as dangerous for Indians. He thought that the Gurukul system was the best education system for the upliftment of Indians and he supported and promoted the same. Staying in Gurukul, the two main duties of the student should be following complete celibacy and gaining knowledge of the whole world. Swami ji has emphasized on compulsory education. He said that in the beginning of the child's life, the mother's contribution is the biggest in five years. The mother should teach the child to pronounce properly, after that the child goes to the school where he remains till the age of twenty five years leave after getting an education. Swami Dayanand emphasized that until men and women of every class are not fully educated, no progress can be made easy for the country. Education is the key to progress.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was in favor of compulsory education. Dayanand emphasized on adopting such an education system which is completely national and which produces such citizens who have a sense of duty and responsibility towards the society. Swami Dayanand strongly supported women's education and rights. At that time, due to illiteracy and ignorance in the society, women were considered inferior to men and their slaves. Regarding women in the Vedas, it has been said that where women are worshipped, gods reside there and now she was facing the painful plight of women in India. Arya Samaj started the work of opening girls' school and spreading women's education, it is continuing even today. Arya Samaj launched vigorous agitation against child marriage and dowry system with the aim of giving proper place to women in the society.

### **Support of Vedic Values and Ashram System**

Following the ancient Indian political philosophy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati supported the ashram system. In this tradition, considering the age of a person as hundred years, life was divided into four parts, Brahmacharya Ashram, Grihastha Ashram, Vanaprastha Ashram and Sanyas Ashram. According to Swami ji, in the first period of the Vedic Ashram system, in the Brahmacharya Ashram, children will be taught to build religious character and they will be developed physically and mentally. In Grihastha Ashram, he will live in the family, beget children, nurture children and fulfill family responsibilities. Staying away from worldly pleasures in the Vanaprastha Ashram, the person will chant the name of God with concentrated mind and will be engrossed in Brahma Sadhna. In Sanyas Ashram, he will renounce all kinds of illusions and retire to lead a life based only on education. This is the true path to attain salvation, so we should adopt it in our life. According to Swami Dayanand Saraswati, if we make Vedic values and ideals the basis of social life, then we can build a cultured and civilized society. But this does not mean that his outlook was narrow and narrow. He also praised the qualities of western culture, he said that we should accept the qualities and goodness that are in the western society.

### **Emphasis on character building**

Swamiji was well aware that a good nation cannot be built without good character. That's why he laid great emphasis on the upliftment of the moral character of the citizens. Swamiji established an organization called Arya Samaj to build the character of the citizens and for their moral and spiritual upliftment. Swamiji was of the view that a person cannot be considered a Brahmin or Shudra just because he was born in a Brahmin or Shudra family. If the actions of a Brahmin are immoral and he is a miscreant then he has no right to remain a Brahmin. If a Shudra's works are good enough and he has knowledge of the Vedas, his strength of character is good, then he will be entitled to get a high position. Swamiji was of the opinion that one cannot become a Sanyasi or a Brahmin just by wearing saffron clothes.

### **Rise of the whole human race**

Swami Dayanand emphasized on the upliftment of the entire human race in his social thoughts. He was not only a Hindu social and religious teacher, but he was also a world guru. His goal was not only the development of the Hindus but the people of the whole world, that is, the development of the human race. In his social philosophy, he established the concept of freedom for human beings to develop according to their wishes and get resources. Swami ji was of the opinion that every person has every right to improve and progress like himself, but he should not hurt others. The concept of universal welfare was the basis of his social thinking.

### **Emphasis on purification movement**

Hindus were forcibly converted from the days of Muslim rule. After coming to power in the hands of the British, Christian priests took the help of temptation along with showing sympathy and love and started converting Hindus to Christianity. In addition to Casteism, the people of the lower castes were suffering from many other ill-practices and stereotypes arising out of ignorance. He found conversion to be a good way for his salvation. It was natural for Swami Dayanand, the protector of Arya Dharma, to turn his attention to this. Swamiji realized that out of fear and desire for money, lakhs of Hindus had converted to Islam or Christianity. Due to this, where hinduism was declining, the number of people following Islam and Christianity was continuously increasing. Propagators of both the religions used to take advantage of the ignorance of the Hindus and instigate them to enter their religion. Where Swami ji opposed this unfair act of both these religions through the purification movement, he also did the work of bringing the people who left Hinduism . The most dangerous thing in this regard in the Hindu society was that where the followers of other religions gladly accepted Hindus in their society, the person who converted to Hinduism from another religion remained ostracized from the society. Keeping all these things in mind, Swami Dayanand reorganized the Hindu caste and started the purification movement. Swami ji purified such Hindus who had converted to Christian or Muslim religion by Veda mantras and Havan and by teaching Hinduism, they entered the society. Swamiji described the purification movement as a new form of the religious tradition of ancient India.

### **Opposition to social evils and superstitions**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati strongly denied various social evils and superstitions prevailing in the society in his views. In the 19th century, there were many evils and superstitions in India, due to which the Indian society was going towards decline. While Swami ji opposed idol worship, he opposed caste system, untouchability, child marriage, sati system, polygamy system, mismatch marriage, purdah system, etc. While he stressed on women's education, considered cow slaughter as a crime and left Hinduism through purification movement and supported the restoration of Vedic traditions. In this way Swami ji strongly attacked the evils and superstitions existing in the society.

## **Establishment of Vedic social system based on moral values**

Swami Dayanand supported the establishment of such an ideal social system which is based on Vedic moral values. He was of the opinion that only individuals based on moral values can establish an ideal system. For this he emphasized the rules of Vedic tradition. According to the Vedic tradition, while following celibate life, people will follow good conduct, they will try to follow truth, loyalty, non-violence, sense restraint, physical and mental purity, devotion to God and keep the body, mind and soul perfect. By doing this, a person will be able to support truth and justice in social life and oppose untruth and injustice.

## **Religious thoughts of Swami Dayanand**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati basically a religious idea. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was that monk who wrote a new chapter of religion bypassing religious practices. Known as an ascetic and a great thinker, Swamiji described the principle of karma, rebirth, celibacy and renunciation as the four pillars of his philosophy. Along with the establishment of Arya Samaj, Swami ji established Hinduism in the world by re-establishing the lost Vedic traditions of India. Whatever political, social, economic and cultural ideas he presented in his various writings and books, the basis of them was his religious thinking. The main religious thoughts of Swamiji are as follows:

### **Re-establishment of the Vedas**

Swami ji had full faith in the Vedas, he considered the Vedas as a means of spiritual progress. According to Swami ji, Vedas are the only texts whose knowledge is given by God, that is, Vedas are divine. If Indians conduct themselves according to the Vedas, their inferiority complex can end. According to Swami ji, Vedas do not only talk about religion, the Vedic method described in them is purely scientific. In these, both spiritual and physical study methods are present. Swami ji not only reinstated the Vedas, which were the center of attraction of the Hindu society after thousands of years, but he also interpreted them according to the universal religion. The re-establishment of the Vedas by Swamiji can be considered a revolutionary event in Indian history, after which a new consciousness was infused in the Hindu society.

### **Belief in the existence of God, soul and nature**

Swami ji had accepted the three elements of God, soul and nature as eternal truth. He believed that God pervades the entire universe. God has created the universe, by creating the universe, God uses his natural creative power.

### **liberal interpretation of religion**

Swami Dayanand has considered religion as Veda in his religious views. According to Swami ji, the only basis of religion is truth and Veda is composed by God, therefore Veda is true book. According to Swami ji, the work that God has ordered for man to do in the Vedas is religion and the work that Vedas do not allow is Adharma. Swami ji has accepted the Vedas as the basis of religion, yet religious fanaticism is not

visible in his thoughts. The main reason for this was that Swamiji explained the Vedas and the religion based on them in a logical and mature manner.

### **Support to universal religion**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati has supported global religion in his religious views. He did not lay the foundation of any other new faith to remove the evils that had come in Hinduism. He encouraged the idea of a universal religion for the welfare of mankind. His universal religion was such a religion which was equally acceptable in all the three periods. Which was truthful and accepted by all without any discrimination and due to altruism and in which the emphasis was on the observance of morality.

### **Belief in monotheism**

Swami ji has given special emphasis on monotheism under his religious views. Dayanand Saraswati believed in monotheism instead of polytheism, he believed that even though the names of God are infinite but God is one in essence. He believed that complete faith in God could be cultivated by leading a pious life. According to Swami ji, the three elements of this world are God, soul and nature, these three are eternal and infinite, these three are true, they exist in every time. He did not believe in God as a personal form of the devotional path of many gods and goddesses of Hindus. There are many names of God in the form of Brahma, in which Om is the best, he is immortal. Swamiji had complete faith in monotheism.

### **Establishment of Arya Samaj**

Swami Dayanand is world famous as a great scholar of Veda Shastras, social reformer and promoter of Arya Samaj. Swami ji wanted to establish such a society which could propagate true religion. To fulfill this objective, he laid the foundation of Arya Samaj. The main aim of Arya Samaj was to spread the true knowledge. Translated the Vedic Code into Hindi to propagate the teachings of the Vedas among the general public. Arya Samaj spread the work of education in all classes. Arya Samaj was a leader in the field of education and its comprehensive educational work was the most important contribution towards national life.

### **Creation of Satyarth Prakash**

After the establishment of the Arya Samaj, Swamiji got Satyarth Prakash published after studying the religious texts and teachings of many religions. Accepting the truth and renouncing untruth was the main objective of this book. True knowledge is not possible without the study of the Vedas. In Satyarth Prakash, the basic philosophical principles related to life have been explained in such a simple way that even an ordinary educated person can become a philosopher by reading. Swamiji told Satyarth Prakash the essence of all religions.



## **Opposition to idol worship**

Swami ji strongly opposed idol worship, he considered idol worship against the Vedas. Swami Dayanand Saraswati believed in the Vedas and in the Vedas, reverence has been given more importance than idol worship, so Dayanand Saraswati was against idol worship, he believed that idol worship is not a religious act but it is a superstition. During his religious tours, Swamiji defeated the supporters of idol worship in scriptures and that priest became a disciple of Swamiji by flowing the idols in the Ganges. Swamiji was of the view that idol worship increases religious ignorance. It gives rise to middlemen in the form of priests between God and devotees who use the money earned from devotees in immoral activities. Swami Dayanand was of the opinion that instead of bowing our heads in front of idols, we should respect our parents, teachers and guests by bowing our heads to them.

## **Inclusion of women and Dalits in Vedic studies**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati believed that it is nowhere written in the Vedas that women and Shudras cannot worship or study Vedic. Therefore, women and Shudras also have as much right to study Vedic as the priestly class.

## **Views Regarding Religion and Politics**

Swamiji considered religion and politics to be interrelated. He was of the view that there cannot be true politics without religion and politics without religion is like poison which kills the soul of the state. Swami ji was of the opinion that the thinkers who are presenting the idea that religion and politics are two separate subjects, then they are cheating the state. They accept the control of religion over the state, they consider politics as subordinate to religion. Swamiji was of the opinion that the entry of religion and spirituality into politics makes it sacred. Being afraid of God, a religious person does not do any work that tarnishes the image of politics. Swami Dayanand criticized the idea of the West that separates politics and religion or morality.

After studying the above social and religious philosophy of Swami Dayanand, we come to the conclusion that Swami ji was not only a social reformer, he was not only a religious thinker, his political outlook was also very broad. He was a supporter of the eternal power of God. Swami Dayanand quickly realized the political condition of India's subjugation. Foreign rule should end and self government should be established in India . This voice was first raised by Swami Dayanand. He also propounded the principle that good governance can never replace self-governance. Swami Dayanand Saraswati has an invaluable contribution in Indian history, because while he tried to organize the society by criticizing the religious evils existing in another country, on the other hand, he protected his culture from foreign religions or western cultural influence and in India Developed the feeling of nationalism. Swamiji opposed untouchability and termed it against the Vedas. Because of his faith in the Vedas, he gave the slogan of return to the Vedas. Swamiji has included women and Dalits in Vedic studies. According to Swami Dayanand Saraswati, only education can uplift man and society. He said that education should be compulsory for all classes and it would be the duty of the state to educate all the people.

Swami Dayanand strongly opposed the caste system and also opposed idol worship. Swami Dayanand wanted the upliftment of the entire human race, so he emphasized on the purification movement. He emphasized character building and supported the Vedic ashram system. Swami Dayanand emphasized truthfulness and fearlessness and opposed social evils and superstitions. He had full faith in the Vedas and expressed full faith in the existence of God, soul and nature. Swami Dayanand believed in monotheism. Swami Dayanand gave a liberal interpretation of religion and supported universal religion. Swamiji has strongly denied the concept of incarnation prevalent in all religions including Hinduism. Swami ji established Arya Samaj with the aim of propagating Vedic knowledge and also got Satyarth Prakash's great work published. Swami ji established Arya Samaj to give concrete shape to his ideas and gave full support to the ancient ashram system.

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