

## Swami Dayanand; A Vedic Visionary's Perspective of Education

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Swami Dayanand Saraswati has undoubtedly been among the greatest thinkers, not only of his time but all the times, who firmly of his time but all the times, who firmly believed that the scientific study of Shartras and their rational interpretations were quite essential for the rebuilding of the society.

He realized that education was a powerful and essential component for the reformation and rebuilding of society.<sup>1</sup> The main objective of his rational thinking about education was to train young boys and girls to attain great heights and to be financially very sound and yet not to be way laid from the path of their cultural and ethical roots.

Swami Dayanand was of the view that education was a solid base on the which the whole frame and fabric of education was to be erected. Hence the curriculum propounded and supported by him gave the utmost priority to the study of Vedas, Upanishads, Manu Smriti and the other holy books. He had himself paid a lot of attention to the study of Sanskrit Grammar and Arsa granths (works by rishis or sages). He did not want to confine education only to the study of scriptures, in fact, he was in favour of including other subjects also, such as different branches of Applied Sciences, Mathematics, Geography, Geology, Astronomy, Space Science and others. The grand success of D.A.V movement stands testimony to his glorious commitment to the field of education. In D.A.V the letter 'A' stands for Anglo, it indicates education based on the western knowledge that is taught through English Medium, but its technical placement between (D) Dayanand and (V) Vedic appears to convey that the

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<sup>1</sup> The Satyarth Prakash (The Light of Truth) by Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, Dr. Ratna Kumari Swadhyaya Sansthana, Allahabad-1981.

objective of D.A.V has always been to combine the knowledge of English, sciences and Humanities along with the knowledge of Vedas. Thus Swamiji envisaged the D.A.V as the robust combination of all that was best in the east and the west.

As a result of Swami's vision of education, the term D.A.V became a symbol of uniqueness and excellence in sports, academics, cultural activities and the other educational areas. The aim of the D.A.V institutions, as conceptualized by Swami was to produce Indians who were patriotic, nationalists in spirit and perspective and proud of their ancient cultural heritage, who would not fall easy prey to fascinations and false propaganda of the deceptive and fallacious missionaries. Thus D.A.V institutions whole heartedly undertook a tough venture of nation building. At present D.A.V institutions are rendering appreciable brilliant service by imparting advantageous education for the robust development of all round personalities of the students. But in order to get Indianized solutions to the various issues faced by the modern society more consistent, committed and focused efforts are still needed in this field.

Our ancients had divided human life in four ashramas. Brahmcharya (student), Grihasth (House hold), Vanprasth (preparatory to renunciation), Sanyas (renunciation). Moreover, every religion is based on certain injunctions (do's and don'ts). Even Vedic Dharma has clearly this code of conduct. It has to be kept in mind that a well-evolved human personality and a progressive social system can be developed by observing some defined code of conduct throughout one's life. The first phase of human life is that of a student known as Brahmacharya. In the Brahmcharya Ashram, the code of conduct is the most essential because it is the early period of growth when mind and body are being formed. It is that phase in which the society strives to transmit its cultural legacy to the child and the growing youth. In his early age of ignorance, desires and emotional instability, the individual's conduct needs to be groomed and shaped by the system of education. Swami Dayanand in the

tradition of Vedic Dharma regarded it as a time of celibacy, studies and diligence and to provide a detailed distribution of Brahmacharya, he had devoted a considerable space in the Chapter II and III of 'Satyarth Prakash'. In Chapter III he had laid specific emphasis on the detailing of the curriculum of the studies and the duties of the pupil.<sup>2</sup>

Swami Dayanand Saraswati gave Vedic injunctions as prescribed by our Shastras. Swamiji desired that a student should perform Sandhya,<sup>3</sup> Agnihotra Yajna and offer prayers to God<sup>4</sup> twice a day. The student must practice Brahmcharya (celibacy) and Pranayam<sup>5</sup> (regulation of breathing) and other exercises to maintain his physical fitness and prepare himself to be equipped to face the difficulties of life in the future years. It should be understood that the word Brahmcharya did not have the limited meaning of abstinence but the wider meaning where mind rises above the body consciousness and wanders in its swarup of 'Brahma' i.e. Pure consciousness. At that level it implied the unification of the soul with the absolute truth. Swami wanted the students to practice five yamas<sup>6</sup> : namely Ahimsa (non violence at physical and mental level); Satya (truth), Brahmcharya (Self-control) Astya (non-stealing or not being avaricious to grab other's share) and Aparigrah (non-hoarding). In his belief, the students should also practice five Niyams<sup>7</sup> (rules) : those are Saucha (cleanliness of body and purity of mind and soul), Santosh (contentment or a state of desire- lessness), Tapa (austerity, training the mind and body rigorously), Swadhyaya (Self-study, self evaluation) and Iswarapranidhana (worship of God). Cultivating all these qualities he would evolve as a committed citizen of complete integrity with sound moral and spiritual background and devotion to the welfare and good of society and the nation. In brief, Swamiji

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, III, 77-89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., III 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., III 16.

<sup>5</sup> Yoga Su; Samadhipada, 34 (quoted in the Light of Truth, III- I I)

<sup>6</sup> Yoga Su, Sadhanapada, 30 (quoted in the Light of Truth, III-32)

<sup>7</sup> Yoga, Su, Sadhanapada, 32 (quoted in the Light of Truth, III-32)

believed that following of the above given rules and regulations would equip the students to work incessantly for the maintenance of social order, this would be done by sinking their selfish motives, adapting to the requirements of the society and unifying their interest with the common interest and welfare of the society.

Such students would never be found to be avaricious to eye others' assets and grab the same by fair or foul means. In contrast to this the general conduct of the modern students is sometimes becoming dangerous roadblock in the way of their own development as well as that of community. In the modern system of education, one can see a large number of graduates who have neither enviable character, nor incorruptibility and honesty, on the other hand they feel proud of being dishonest and term it cleverness, who feel proud of not abiding by the rules and regulations laid down by the society, infact who are invariably breaking rules and shirking from their duties and responsibilities. They can be seen for ever demanding more and more wages and emoluments, even at the cost of making the community suffer.

Such a system of education can never contribute towards building a nation of strong, honest and committed youth. It is rather contributing towards the task and situation of breaking and dividing the community. It will be therefore useful to think of pursue the value-oriented education propounded and supported by Swami Dayanand Saraswati for the upkeep and maintenance of the social order in the modern society.

One of the main characteristics of Swami Dayanand's concept of education was that he favoured opening the doors of education for all the classes, including underprivileged classes like the women<sup>8</sup> and the Shudras. He had the far-sightedness to extend to them the greatest educational facilities, as well as privileges namely the study of the scriptures especially the Vedas. The two greatest religious responsibilities of the samaj as per Swamiji's beliefs, were to bring India back on the forsaken, forgotten as well as neglected Vedic path

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<sup>8</sup> Manu, II 164. (Quoted in the Light of Truth, III, 45-46)

and to preach the Vedic ideals throughout the whole world. The philosophy of Swami Dayanand about Vedic Scriptures can be summed up this:- First and foremost, Vedas are the revelation from God as is proved by their relation and connectivity with nature; Second they are the one and only one (sole) revelation from God since no other book shows this connection, third, they are consequently, the basic origin of the science and religion of humanity. Hence all branches of religion have no option but to accept the final authority of the vedic religion.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was of the firm belief that religion and morality were the foundation of the true education. India had never conceived of the separation between education and religion. This sort of separation between religion and education can have disastrous effects. History stands testimony to it. At the dawn of our Independence, only religion had prevailed. In the hands of the selfish politicians, it took the form of fanaticism. Thereafter it resulted in communalism and the partition of the country was the heart-rending result. In the name of so called secularism, our country adopted blind religious madness and it divorced ethics and moral instruction from our educational system. Such an education was bound to cause havoc in all walks of life. Educational institutions are undoubtedly the source and seed grounds for all trades, professions and activities. But in the present times the premises of the educational institutions have become corrupted, polluted and poisoned and as a result education too has become vitiated. The moral waywardness, the frequent disturbances on the campuses suddenly erupting in the form of student's strikes and rowdyism, arson, looting, the closures of colleges and universities over very long periods signify that something has certainly gone amiss in our existing system of education, So the firm belief of Swami Dayanand in going back to the Vedas<sup>9</sup> is still as relevant today as was required in the

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<sup>9</sup> Manu, II, 12-13, 21 (quoted in the Light of Truth, III-45-46)

Vedic period and every period thereafter. It is needed to establish a robust system of education in the present society.

Besides the study of Vedas, Swami ji promoted the study of Arse Granthas (the works of the Rishis and Sages) and the standard books. This was meant to motivate students to go to the original masters and to distance themselves from reliability on the derived or distilled books, their summaries or abstracts. The decline and downfall of our present education system has been due to not paying attention to the World Classic literature and our dependence on cheap notes and guides which provide very little, superficial, flimsy and inadequate knowledge of a subject.

It would not be out of place here to silence much of the wrongly placed criticism about Swami Dayanand's concept of education based on an unmanageable vast syllabus which included scriptures i.e. Ashtadhyayi, Mahabhashya, Nirukta Chandashstra by pingal Manusmriti, Epics such as Valmiki Ramayan, Mahabharata, Ethics i.e. Vidhura Niti, Philosophy namely six systems of Indian Philosophy, the four Vedic Sanhitas, the four Brahmans (Aitray, Satapathy, Gopatha, Sarna) and four Upvedas along with the study of Algebra, Geometry, Arithmetic, Geography, Geology, Jyotish (only Astronomy not Astrology). Swami had given such a vast syllabus because his Brahmchari (Pupil) was to stay at Gurukul or with his reverent teacher (Guru) for a very long period of twenty years from the age of 5 to 25, he would be completely cut off from his home and family. The modern cynical critics may believe that such an education for the modern world and its struggle is superfluous, futile and irrelevant. Moreover, the modern persons feel that devoting so much time to reading of the religious books is a sheer waste of time and energy. In this education, there was a lot of stress on the learning of Sanskrit (the modern critics can call this obsolete and Sanskrit as a dead language), rhythm and etymology, which the modern believers donot comprehend or cannot gauge their relevance. But it has to be understood that the main

objective of Swami's education was to build extremely moral and spiritual men with deep-rooted knowledge and lofty ideals.<sup>10</sup>

There is no denying the fact the modern system of education strives to equip men and women for various professions and businesses to sustain themselves and to make a decent living. It is a well known fact that unless persons have good conduct, and are fully integrated within, are committed to the welfare of the society, inspite of being skilled engineers, learned doctors, administrators, blessed with technical expertise, they would certainly be on the verge of collapse.

It could be realized that the education through the curriculum suggested by Swami was the most appropriate and valuable. Moreover, even if the details of Swami's syllabus are thought to be outdated and obsolete, with the passage of time, but still it has to be appreciated that the values emphasized in it are fundamental, evergreen and as relevant today as these were in ancient times.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati seemed quite aware of the fact that the noble goals of education could be attained only if education to the young was imparted by capable and efficient teachers. In the second chapter of 'Satyarth Prakash' a well known quotation from Satapatha Brahman<sup>11</sup> had been cited which adds that a man becomes learned only when he has been blessed by three proper instructors (Gurus) the mother, father and the Guru that child is the most fortunate and family is most blessed where the parents of the child have imbibed the sense of propriety and knowledge. A hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. The lap of a mother is the best school. Nobody in the world showers as much affection and love on the children as the mother does. In the same way parents and Gurus/teachers should inculcate a sense of self control, love of knowledge and love of benign company in their children and students. Those parents and teachers who inculcate a sense of discipline among

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<sup>10</sup> Manu, 1, 108-09 (quoted in the Light of Truth, III-44)

<sup>11</sup> Satapatha Bra. (quoted in the Light of Truth II-1)

their children and pupils are believed to be giving nectar (Amrit) to them. On the other hand, those who treat their children and pupil indulgently are, infact ruining them by as if giving them poison. Undue love makes children and pupils lazy and lethargic, they should be duly trained to love firm handling and dislike excessive affection.<sup>12</sup> Quoting a verse from Chanakya Niti, Swamiji makes it clear that those parents are the sworn enemies of their children who do not provide them education. They are insulted/ humiliated in the society of the learned persons just as a crane is out of place in the company of swans.<sup>13</sup> It implies that it is truly the chief duty and highly ethical responsibility of the parents that they should expend all their energy, mental strength and wealth to the provision of knowledge and imparting of excellent instructions to the children.

On the basis of the above mentioned facts, it is clear that Swami Dayanand Saraswati recognized education as a life-long process that makes an individual capable of deciding his right place in and in relation to the world and society. As per Swami's views efficacy in discharging social responsibilities should be regarded as one of the significant assets of the youth. It may appear to us that it is a very rigorous and unpleasant task to control the youth of the country, especially in the light of the provision of comfortable boarding and lodging to the students in the modern educational institutions. But it is also true that the Do's and Dont's i.e the restrictions and prescriptions prescribed in the past, as suggested by Swamiji, go a long way in helping students develop a healthy and tough physique a sharpened and discerning intellect, a sharp memory, well-controlled senses and high ethical regimen. The modern students are devoid of these qualities. Moreover the system of modern education has failed miserably in inculcating a sense of responsibility and civic sense in the young students. Therefore, there is a need to reconstruct and redirect the system of modern education on the basis of the Vedic guidelines given by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. His value based vision of

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<sup>12</sup> Mahabhasya of patanjali on Astadyayi 8, 1, 8

<sup>13</sup> Canakya Niti, II-11 (quoted in the Light of Truth, II-2)

education would inspire all learned and committed seekers of the truth and the unwavering followers of the code of conduct to conquer temptations of material wealth and power and self and to remain focused on the path of goodness and propriety. Such a qualified and obedient citizen would contribute towards peaceful and harmonious co-existence in the society and make sure that the education acquires need based features but brilliantly carries value-based persona on the path of individual as well as collective progress.

### **Conclusion**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj was a visionary educationist social reformer and a philanthropist par excellence. Steeped in Vedic learning, he conceptualized education which can be called as an amalgamation of Western and eastern thought. D.A.V institutions adequately represent his vision. He believed that our 'Vedas' have prescribed injunctions and code of conduct for the learners in particular and for all in general. These values would keep the student determined and focused. He would evolve as a fully integrated individuals with the alignment of body, mind and deeds, he would be reverential to the nature and divinity and compassionate towards the fellow beings. Swamiji was aware of the weakness that had crept in the social fabric. He opened the door of education and of the reading of scriptures for women and shudras as well. Thus the discrimination on the basis of sex and caste was curbed. The ideal teacher combining love and discipline would prepare the youth of the country to face the vicissitudes of life. The ideal combination of modern sciences and ancient wisdom would produce balanced individuals. Thus Swamiji on the basis of Vedic learning had evolved modern education Curriculum not lacking in Western thought but beautifully combining the rich heritage of scriptures along with it.