

# Making of the Mahatma : From Mool Shankar to Dayanand Saraswati

## Abstract

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj, was one of the most powerful figures of modern India, who through the establishment of *Arya Samaj*, played an important part in the Indian renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Arya Samaj spread a new wave of consciousness amongst the Indians in the socio-religious and political spheres and was the first organization, which popularized the notions of Swadeshi, Swa-Bhasha and Swaraj, which was later on adopted by the then Congress leaders (eg Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi ). It will be interesting to note the various developments in the early life of Dayanand Saraswati, which influenced him, shaped his thoughts and which moulded his personality from a mere ordinary boy to the great social reformer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Mool Shankar or Dayaram, Karsanji Lal ji Trivedi, Tankara (Morvi), Audichya Brahmin, Shuddhachaitanya, Paramhansa Parmanand, Purnanand Saraswati, Swami Virjanand, Mathura.

## Introduction

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was born at Tankara (Morvi), a town situated on the bank of the Machhooka Mahanadi, in Kathiawar (Gujrat), in the Vikram era 1881 (1824 A.D.), in a Audichya Brahmin family.<sup>1</sup> His original name was Mool Shankar or Dayaram , and his father's name was Karsanji Lal ji Trivedi.<sup>2</sup> His father was the head of an eminent Brahman family of the village<sup>3</sup> and was rich, prosperous and influential. Karsanji was in service, holding the position of Jamadar, and this office was hereditary in his family.<sup>4</sup> "Karsanji was a man of stern disposition", writes Bawa Chhajju Singh<sup>5</sup>, "having no faith in half measures. When he set his heart upon doing a thing, or when duty called upon him to undertake anything, he would set about his task with a will, and would not rest till it was accomplished, or till it was proved that, for some reason or other, it was in spite of the best he could do, impossible of accomplishment." "Mool Shankar's ( or Dayanand's ) mother, on the other hand," observes Bawa Chhajju Singh,<sup>6</sup> "was a personification of patience, gentleness and sweetness. While her love for her child was unbounded, she had a genuine kindly feeling for all around her, ready to share their sorrows and to participate in their joys on all occasion."

Mool Shankar inherited these traits of his parents and it was therefore but natural that while he had, on the one hand, the indomitable will and immutable resolves of his father, on the other, he possessed a gentle heart that embraced the whole world in its circle of sympathy.

When Mool Shankar was five years old<sup>7</sup> his education commenced. He proved an extraordinary apt pupil, passing from one elementary book to another in rapid succession. In his eighth year his *Yajnopavita Sanskar* was performed, and the investiture with thread of the "twiceborn" was forthwith followed by his initiation into the *sandhya* and *upasna* (i.e. sacred religious Hindu duties and ceremonies).<sup>8</sup> Karsanji though a Saamvedi Brahman, was a follower of Shiva, and as such he taught his son, Rudri, following it by the Samhita. "No pains", observes Bawa Chhajju Singh<sup>9</sup>, "were spared to impress young Dayanand with the sacredness and superiority of the Shiva faith, and the importance of keeping of the fasts peculiar to the creed was continually made clear to him."

Till Mool Shankar reached his tenth year, he was fairly regular in his adoration of Shiva, but beyond paying this homage at stated hours, he did not concern himself much with Shaivism. His father, however, was not satisfied with this much. He longed to see him observe the more rigorous fasts as his elders kept, and wanted him to hear the religious did not concern himself much with Shaivism. His father, however, was not satisfied with this much. He longed to see him observe the more rigorous

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the more rigorous fasts as his elders kept, and wanted him to hear the religious *kathas* (stories) and for keeping long and trying vigils at night.<sup>10</sup> By the time Mool Shankar was fourteen years of age, he knew the whole of the Yajur Veda Samhita by heart, some portions of the remaining three Vedas and some minor works on Sanskrit grammar.

At the age of fourteen (on Magh Badi 14, 1837)<sup>11</sup> that famous incident happened, which changed the life of Mool Shankar as well as the course of human history. His father, as he was a staunch Shaivite, asked him to keep the fast of Shivratri. Mool Shankar was at first reluctant to comply with his father's wishes, but when the *katha*, setting forth the spiritual blessings and the meritoriousness of the fast, was recited to him, he consented. As the evening set in, the father and son went to large Shiva temple outside the village, where the rules in connection with the worship of the presiding deity of the sacred shrine were duly explained to him. One of the injunctions was that the devotee who kept the fast of Shivratri, must remain awake the whole night, as otherwise the fast would bear no fruit. To prevent himself, therefore, from dropping into a slumber, he took to vigorously sprinkling water over his eyes, and to thinking. While thus employed, he saw something that drew him out of his abstraction and riveted his attention on itself.

A mouse creeping out of its hole began to take liberties with the *linga* of Shiva, and started to eat the offerings which were offered to it by the worshippers. For many moments Mool Shankar watched the doings of the little creature with amusement. But this soon raised many questions in his mind about the omnipotence of the God, who was considered as the creator of the universe. possibly amused a little, but serious thoughts followed, and he mused: "Is this the Mahadeva or the supreme god", he asked himself, "whom the *katha* represented as deity with human shape, with a trident in his hand and playing upon the drum - the God who bestows a boon upon one and pronounces a curse upon another, and who is the Lord of the Kailash mountain? This image has not the power to drive away even an insignificant mouse!"<sup>12</sup> Mool Shankar thought long and hard and intently, and this thinking laid the foundation of that great, all-embracing religious revolution which he subsequently wrought in the land of his birth.

After this incident, which his mind and his heart could not forget, Mool Shankar threw himself wholeheartedly into his studies, reading with a Pandit, Nighantu, Nirukta, Purva Mimansa and works on karmakand (rituals).<sup>13</sup> His leisure was now devoted to his books. While Mool Shankar was busy with his books, another accident happened which made the seriousness of the problem still more apparent to him. When he was at the close of his sixteenth year his sister, (Mool Shankar had two brothers and two sisters and all of them were younger than Mool Shankar) who was fourteen years of age, was suddenly taken ill with cholera and died in a painful condition.<sup>14</sup> After three years, when he was 19 years of age, one of his uncles, with whom he was deeply attached died.<sup>15</sup> It was terrible shock to young Mool Shankar as he was deeply attached to them. He felt like one utterly unnerved and stupefied. "Ah!" said he

to himself," remarks Bawa Chhajju Singh,<sup>16</sup> "when he was able to reflect, "who can defy death? Not one of the beings, that ever lived who could escape the cold hand of death. I, too, may be snatched away any time and die. How, then, shall I be able to fulfill my resolve of alleviating human misery, and where shall I find the assurance and means of attaining Mukti, the final beatitude?" It was then, that he made a resolve of seeking the way to release himself from the bonds of life and death and go out in search of Truth.

The nature of the aspirations and the questions which perturbed his minds were soon understood by his father and mother. It was resolved that he should be married as early as possible.<sup>17</sup> They soon disclosed their intentions to Mool Shankar, who was so frightened at the idea of marriage that he flew to the friends of the family and appealed them to convince his parents not to marry him and allow him to continue his studies. They sympathetically listened to his prayer, and succeeded in inducing his father Karsanji to postpone the marriage for a year.

The twelve months passed quickly and the suspicious parents renewed their efforts to convince him to marry. Finding that nothing would move his parents, and also that his mother in particular was dead against his leaving home, Mool Shankar, in despair, asked to be permitted to reside at a village a few miles from his own, and where the landed property of the family principally lay. The father thought that Mool Shankar would not object to taking care of the property, and he proposed that he should take upon himself the work and the responsibility of a superintendent. "But Dayanand," observes Bawa Chhajju Singh,<sup>18</sup> "was disposed to do such thing. He wanted to reside in the other village because a learned man resided there, and if he was not to be allowed to go to Kashi, he might as well study for some time with this learned man."

Mool Shankar commenced his studies with the new Pandit, and the latter was delighted with his progress. One day, in the course of conversation, he openly confessed to his teacher that he had no intention of marrying, and that he positively disliked being a "householder." The teacher reported his words to his father, who immediately re-called him to his native village, and ordered that preparations for his marriage should be made without any further delay. Mool Shankar was at a loss what to do. He consulted his friends, but they, being afraid of his parents and being conservatives and traditionalists like his parents, advised him to marry.

After much reflection, Mool Shankar came to the conclusion that his only means of escape from marriage lay in flight.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The following research paper highlights the various episodes of the early life of Dayanand Saraswati and the incidents that turned him from Mool Shankar (his original name) to Dayanand Saraswati, the famous social reformer of the 19th century India as well as the role of various factors that shaped his destiny in his early period.

#### **Renunciation**

Mool Shankar left his father's home at the age of twenty-one years in the Jyeshtha of Vikrama Samvat 1903 (1846 A.D.)<sup>19</sup> While moving from one

place to another, he heard about a distinguished saint named Lala Bhagat, who lived at Sayle, a town some six miles from Mooli, a well-known station on the Wadhwan-Morvi line.<sup>20</sup> At Lala Bhagat's house, where many spiritual persons, sadhus etc. used to come, a Brahmachari conferred upon him the privileges of the order to which he himself belonged, and named him Shuddhachaitanya (pure-minded), making him put on ochre-colored garments and keep a Kamandal (the beggar's gourd) as his constant companion.

Here, Mool Shankar or Shuddhachaitanya came to know about the annual fair at Siddhapur, a Railway station on the bank of the river Saraswati, which was going to take place in a few days. Thinking that he might come across some yogi there who could point out to him the way to salvation, he set off towards that locality. Meanwhile, his parents who were very much worried about him and were on his constant trail, got a clue from one of their acquaintances and came to Siddhapur. In the temple of Mahadev there, Karsanji at last found his son but was shocked to see him dressed in ochre-colored clothes. He lost his control and severely rebuked him. He called him the disgrace of his family, the cause of eternal shame to his race, and so on. Taking hold of his garments, he tore them to pieces, and dashing his bowl on the ground smashed it to fragments. In spite of all that Mool Shankar had said to set his father's mind at rest, the old man had no faith in his words. He deputed the sepoy to look after him so that he might not run away once more and gave them strict orders not to let him go anywhere.

When the night came Mool Shankar found himself that he was being watched closely and continuously. While he lied in his bed, dejected and reflecting over his fate, he found that the guard, who was keeping an eye over him, had fallen asleep. Finding another chance, he silently got off his bed and ran as fast as he could, to be away from his father's reach.

Passing through Ahmedabad, he arrived at Baroda. Here associating with the Sanyasis and Brahmacharis of the non-dualistic school he himself became a Vedanti, believing in the identity of God and soul. During his wanderings, he came in contact with many learned Sadhus and with one of these-Paramhansa Parmanand - he resumed his studies, and, in the course of a few months, had gone through Vedantasara, Arya Harimedede Totaka, Arya Harihara Totaka, Vedantaparibhasha, and similar other works.

As a Brahmachari, Mool Shankar, in conformity with the usual practice, had to cook his meals himself. This greatly interfered with his studies. To get rid of this trouble, he made up his mind to enter the Sanyasa Ashrama. The initiation would be, he thought, useful to him in another way: it would give him a name which would completely hide his identity and would minimize the chances of his being reclaimed by the members of his family. They knew him as Shuddhachaitanya, but when this name would be dropped in favor of a sanyasa name, a great clue to his whereabouts would be lost, and he could then count upon the enjoyment of greater freedom in his movements. With this idea in his mind, he requested a Sanyasi named Chidashrama to initiate him into

sanyasa. His request was refused on the ground of his extreme youth. The refusal, however, had no discouraging effect upon Mool Shankar.

He was firmly resolved upon being initiated, and after a year and a half he got his chance. A Dandi Swami and a Brahmachari came and halted in a forest near the town of Chanod. The name of the Dandi Swami was Purnanand Saraswati.<sup>21</sup> He was very much impressed by the profound learning of Dandi Swami and requested him to initiate him into the *sanyasa*. After much discussion the Swami agreed and on the expiration of the third day after the meeting, the important function took place, and Mool Shankar or Shuddhachaitanya came to be named as - Dayanand Saraswati.<sup>22</sup>

In the Chaitra of 1856, Dayanand set off in search of the source of the Nerbada, having heard that the tract around was the abode of learned Sanyasis and Yogis. For three whole years he wandered along the banks of the Nerbada, and it was during these wanderings that he came to hear of the great Sanyasi Virjanand at Mathura. Something whispered into his ear that this was the man he had been looking for in vain for so many years, and at the call of his conscience he went to Mathura. Romain Rolland, writing about this period of Dayanand's life, rightly observes that "for fifteen years this son of a rich Brahmin, despoiled of everything and subsisting on alms, wandered as a sadhu clad in the saffron robe along roads of India. Dayananda went in search of learned men, ascetics, studying here philosophy, there the Vedas, learning the theory and practice of the Yoga. He visited almost all the holy places of India and took part in religious debates. He suffered, he braved fatigue, insult and danger."<sup>23</sup>

#### Meeting with Swami Virjanand at Mathura

Dayanand reached Mathura in some part of the year 1916, V.E (1859 A.D.)<sup>24</sup> and he immediately rushed to the abode of Swami Virjanand. In his very first meeting, Virjanand after thoroughly examining Dayanand, told him that there was a vast difference between the true Aryan literature and the books composed by common mortals, and also that he had absolutely no respect for the latter and never taught them. Dayanand could not unburden his mind of the idea he had clung to for years, in a moment, but the arguments of the Swami prevailed, and he eventually consented to have nothing to do with the works which had the stamp of true science and true wisdom on them.

He even went to the extreme of throwing in the Yamuna his old stock of books, so that Virjanand might be pleased, and admit him as his pupil. "Dayanand's life at Mathura", observes Bawa Chhaju Singh,<sup>25</sup> "was a life of incessant toil. He read day and night, spending hours in thought and contemplation, and frequently holding discussion with his fellow-students on various subjects of importance. In his moments of leisure, he would speak to those around him on the value of *Brahmacharya*, and exhort them, particularly the Brahmans, to be regular in the performance of their *sandhya* and their *agnihotra*. His extreme thirst for knowledge, his quick and clear perception of the nature of things, his lucid and convincing expositions of *Shastric* teaching, and, above all, his righteous ways made him a favorite with

the student community, and his company was sought after by them, one and all."

Dayanand's reverence for Virjanand increased daily. He loved and served him with his whole heart, performing most cheerfully the humblest offices to please him and to make him more comfortable. He would sweep the floor, and bring pitcher after pitcher of water from the Yamuna, so that the dirt might be effectually washed out of the house, and his preceptor have his daily bath liberally.

Nearly for two and-a-half years, Dayanand studied under Swami Virjanand, and during this period he had mastered Ashtadhyayi, Mahabhashya, the Vedanta Sturas, and many other works. And when his course of education was finished, and he thought it was time for him to leave, he, in conformity with the usages of olden times, approached his guru and, laying half a seer of cloves before him, asked permission to depart.

Virjanand gave him his blessings and called upon him to produce, after the fashion of the students of olden days, suitable *dakshina* (present) marking the termination of his course of education. Dayanand answered that he had nothing that he could venture to offer to his most revered guru.

"Dear son, you have got it, and that is true knowledge. If you would pay me my *dakshina*, give this knowledge to thy motherland. The Vedas have long ceased to be taught in *Bhartavarsha* (India), go and teach them; teach the true *Shastras*, and dispel, by their light, the darkness which the false creeds have spread. Remember that while works by common men are utterly misleading as to the nature and attributes of the one true God, and slander the great *Rishis* and *Munis*, those by the ancient teachers are free from such a blemish. This is the test which will enable you to differentiate the true, ancient teaching from the writings of ordinary men", said his guru.

Dayanand bowed his head in acquiescence, assuring his guru that he would do his best to accomplish the task assigned to him, upon which the guru once more gave him his blessing and permitted him to depart. How far Dayanand kept his word and how far he succeeded in redeeming that word, is now known to the whole world.

### Conclusion

Thus we see that various factors including his own curious, philosophical and inquisitive nature, death of some of his own near and dear ones, the superstitious, conservative and dogmatic attitude of the age in which he lived, influence of certain religious gurus, etc shaped his thoughts and transformed him from an ordinary boy named Mool Shankar to Dayanand Saraswati, the great social reformer. It also reflects the role of the masterly touch of Swami Virjanand of Mathura, who channelized his energies for the social and religious reconstruction of the Indian society. Dayanand was a born rebel, an iconoclast and as such he chose to tread on the path for which he was destined to go, for the betterment of the humanity.

### References

1. After an intense research, this fact was brought forth by Shri Devendra nath Mukhopadhyaya, the author of Dayanand's biography entitled *Dayanand Charit* (in Bangla), which was

published in 1894 AD. Whereas, according to Pt. Lekhram, who spent many years, during 1890s, in finding the truth about the early life of Dayanand Saraswati has mentioned that he was born in Morvi and his father's name was Amba Shankar. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas*, Vol. I, Arya Swadhya Kendra, New Delhi, second edition, 1989, pp. 190-191. For a detailed and authentic study of Swami Dayanand's life, his work and his tour in India (and particularly his tour in Rajasthan), readers are requested to refer to Vidyalkar Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas*, Vol. I (From beginning to 1883 AD); Vidyalkar Satyaketu, Vedalkar, Haridutt and Bhartiya, Bhawani Lal, authors of *Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas*, Vol. II, (from 1883 to 1947), Arya Swadhya Kendra, New Delhi, 1989. For a better understanding of this subject, readers should also consult Bawa Chhajju Singh, Life and Teachings of Swami Dayanand, Part I and II, Dayanand Sansthan, New Delhi, 1997; Bharadwaj, Chiranjiva, Light of Truth - Satyarth Prakash, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, New Delhi, 1984; and Prasad, Durga, An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, "The Luther of India", Virjanand Press, Lahore, 1908.

2. Ibid. For a detailed study of Swami Dayanand's life and his contribution in women's upliftment, readers are requested to consult Goswami, Sambodh, Voicing the Unvoiced (Women's Questions and Arya Samaj), Yking Publications, Jaipur, 2016.
3. In mid 1875, during his stay at Poona, Swami Dayanand delivered nearly 15 lectures there. In the last lecture, on the request of some of his followers, he hesitatingly gave some hints about his early life, about his parents, about the place of his birth etc. These lectures were published in the local newspapers, later on they were translated in Marathi, Gujrati and Hindi. In Hindi these lectures were published in a book entitled 'Updesh Manjari'. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, Vol. I, op.cit, p. 187.
4. Ibid. p. 191.
5. Bawa Chhajju Singh, Life and Teaching of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Part I, Dayanand Sansthan, 1997, (Third edition), New Delhi, p. 1.
6. Ibid. p. 1.
7. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, Vol. I, op.cit. p. 192.
8. Ibid.
9. Bawa Chhajju Singh, Part I, op.cit. p. 2.
10. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, op.cit. p. 192.
11. Ibid. p. 192.
12. Ibid. p. 192.
13. Bawa, Chhajju Singh, Part I, op.cit., p. 5.
14. Ibid.
15. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, Vol. I, op.cit. p. 193.
16. Bawa, Chhajju Singh, Part I, op.cit., p. 6.
17. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, Vol. I, op.cit. p. 193.
18. Bawa, Chhajju Singh, op.cit, p. 9.

19. Cf. Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, Vol. I, op.cit.p.194.
20. For a detailed description of Swami Dayanand's early life and his wanderings in various parts of India, in search of knowledge and spiritual guru, please refer to Bawa Chhajju Singh's book- Life and Teaching of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Part I, Dayanand Sansthan , 1997, (Third edition), New Delhi. For a detailed and authentic study of Swami Dayanand's life, his work and his tour in India (and particularly his tour in Rajasthan), readers are requested to refer to Vidyalkar Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas*, Vol.I (From beginning to 1883 AD); Vidyalkar Satyaketu , Vedalkar, Haridutt and Bhartiya ,Bhawani Lal, authors of *Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas*, Vol.II, (from 1883 to 1947), Arya Swadhaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1989. Readers should also consult Bharadwaj, Chiranjiva, Light of Truth - Satyarth Prakash, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, New Delhi, 1984; and Prasad, Durga, An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, "The Luther of India", Virjanand Press ,Lahore,1908.
21. Cf.Vidyalkar, Satyaketu and Vedalkar, Haridutt, Vol. I, op.cit. p.196, and also, Bawa Chhajju Singh, op.cit., p.14.
22. Bawa, Chhajju Singh, Part I,op. cit., p.15.
23. Cf. Romain Rolland, Dayanand and Arya Samaj, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha & Delhi Arya Pratinidhi Sabha,New Delhi, 2006, p.4
24. Bawa, Chhajju Singh, Part I, op.cit.,pp. 14-15.
25. Bawa, Chhajju Singh, Part I, ibid.pp.14-15.