

Dayanand Saraswati-The Champion of Women's Education



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Abstract

One of the most important and extensive social reform movements was initiated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), who was one of the few great men of the world, who sacrificed everything for emancipation of mankind. He was a great scholar, a *yogi*, a social reformer, a philosopher and a political thinker. Swami Dayanand was one of the most powerful figures of modern India, who spread the *Vedic* religion and through the *Arya Samaj*, played an important part in the Indian renaissance. The following research paper highlights the views of Dayanand Saraswati on education and especially on the education of women, which was considered as taboo in those days but which had a direct relationship with certain social issues pertaining to women viz. child and unequal marriages, deplorable condition of widows (and child widows), widow remarriage, education of boys and girls etc.

Keywords: Dayanand Saraswati, Equalitarian, Emancipation of Women, Champion of Women's Education, Social Reformer.

Introduction

One of the most important and extensive social reform movements was initiated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), who was one of the few great men of the world, who sacrificed everything for emancipation of mankind. He was a great scholar, a *yogi*, a social reformer, a philosopher and a political thinker. Swami Dayanand was one of the most powerful figures of modern India, who spread the *Vedic* religion and through the *Arya Samaj*, played an important part in the Indian renaissance. "He had taken a long and deep draught," observed *The Hindu Patriot* of 17th January 1870, "at the perennial spring-head which had quenched his thirst and filled his soul with indescribable peace. He had wandered long and far in the gloom before he received the light- the light of true and pure *Dharma*, the religion of the *Vedas*. With insight born of this light, he saw clearly through the vast and enveloping mist of error, delusion and superstition which was bedimming the vision of the inhabitants of India and of other parts of the globe. He did not hug this new-found treasure to his bosom like a miser lest others might come to know of it and snatch it away from him; but, like a generous prince he made a free gift of it to his people".

During his travels to various parts of India, he found the condition of his country and that of the Hindu society deplorable and depressing. Many superstitions, dogmas and undesirable rituals were propounded in the name of religion. They included untouchability, prohibition on education and re-marriage of women (even if widowed in infancy or childhood), *sati* (self immolation by a wife upon the death of her husband) and child and un-equal or unmatched marriage. Swami Dayanand resolved to awaken India and the Hindu society. In his famous book, *Satyartha Prakash* (The Light of Truth), he sought to dispel rituals, dogmas and superstitions among all Indians.

He, in order to preach his social and religious philosophy visited the different natives States of the Rajputana like Karauli, Gangapur, Bharatpur, Chittaurgarh, Beawar, Jodhpur, Dholpur, Jaipur, Udaipur, Shahpura, Kishangarh, Kushalgarh, Mount Abu, and *thikanas* of Raipur, Bagru, Dudu, Sardargarh, Achrol and Benara and the British administered territory of Ajmer-Merwara from 1865 to 1883 and impressed the masses as well as the native rulers and nobles¹. He believed that if rulers could be involved in the social reform process then things would become much easier as the people still considered them in high esteem. Therefore, initially, he

concentrated upon impressing the native rulers and Chiefs the need to identify with the cause and undertake due steps to bring about a social change. His charismatic personality and his versatility dazzled and impressed the native rulers and *jagirdars* of Rajputana.

For the first time, he came to the Rajputana in 1865, and visited the British-dominated territory of Ajmer, and observed with great interests, the pomp and show of the priests at Pushkar. He had his first *shastrartha* (i.e. religious debate) at Ajmer in 1865, with Christian priest John Tobson². On 14th November, 1878 he had a great *shastrartha* with Dr. Husband-the Christian priest of Ajmer and by his forceful arguments and eloquent speech, he created a great dent on the minds of the ordinary as well as elite people of Ajmer. After the discourse, Rao Bahadur Singh First, *Istimrardar* of Ajmer, invited him to come to Masooda (Ajmer) and Swamiji stayed there from 2nd of December to 10th of December 1878.

The following research paper highlights the views of Dayanand Saraswati on education and especially women education, which had a direct relationship with certain social issues pertaining to women viz. child and unequal marriages, deplorable condition of widows (and child widows), widow remarriage, education of boys and girls etc³.

Dayanand's Views on Education

On April 10, 1875, Swami Dayanand established the *Arya Samaj* as a permanent organization to continue to educate the Hindus of their rich heritage and to reform the social structure within India, largely through the spread of education, especially that of women. He held ignorance as the root cause of all the miseries and felt that emancipation depended on removal of this ignorance and also that there is no emancipation as long as ignorance persists. "The world is fettered by the chain forged by superstition and ignorance," he declared⁴, "and I have come to snap asunder that chain and to set slaves at liberty. It is contrary to my mission to have people deprived of their freedom". "The purpose of my life", he said once⁵, "is the extirpation of evils; introduction of truth in thought, speech, and deeds; the preservation of unity of religion; the expulsion of mutual enmity; the extension of friendly intercourse; and the advancement of public happiness by reciprocal subservience of the human family."

He recommended various multifarious activities for the betterment of women in Indian society. He not only emphasized upon the abolition of abhorrent practices and customs pertaining to them, but also, advocated women's upliftment through provision for their education. He also motivated them to come out of their *purdah* or veil and fight for their own cause. He revolted against the abuses from which they suffered, recalling that in the heroic age they occupied in the home and in the society a position at least equal to men. They ought to have equal education, according to him, and supreme control in marriage, over household matters including

the finances. He strongly recommended women's education and their participation in all religious ceremonies including the performance of *yajnas*.

Dayanand was a staunch supporter of education and believed that the chief duty of the father, preceptor, and kinsmen is to adorn the offspring with the ornaments of the best education, the sense of duties and the attainment of good qualities, morality and nature. "Those fathers and mothers are great enemies of their own children", he cited a sloka from *Chanakya Niti*,⁶ "who have not taught them any kind of Knowledge...It is the imperative duty, the highest virtue, the cause of fame of the parents to make their children learned, virtuous, civilized and well educated at the expense of their own comfort, thought and wealth." He believed that the soul of man can never be adorned with the ornaments made of gold, silver, rubies, pearls, corals, and other gems (but by education). He believed in the universality of education and as such considered that it was the duty of the State to see that no children are left behind in getting school education. In support of his contention, he cited the following verse from *Manu Samhita*⁷, which said that "there should be a government order and national custom," he remarked, "that persons must not keep their sons and daughters at home after they are 8 years of age. They must send them to schools at the pain of penalty". Similarly, addressing the native kings, he said,⁸ "The king should order the enforcement of the vow of chastity among all the girls and boys of his dominions for a definite period of their age, and have them acquire knowledge to be civilized. If it be not obeyed by any young person, its mother and father should be punished. In plain words, it should be a standing order of the king that none should keep their sons or daughters at home after their eight years of age"(sic). He believed that just as boys should be taught religion, grammar, and other sciences of practical utility, similarly girls should be taught grammar, religion, medicine, mathematics and other household works, so that they themselves may handle the problems of the day-today life and not become the shadows of their husbands. "A girl, who has followed the *Brahmacharya* for 24 years," he remarked⁹, "and who has read the *vedangs* (i.e. *shiksha, kalpa, vyakarana, nirukta, chhanda* and *jyotish*) and *upanga* (i.e. *mimansa, vaisheshik, nyaya, yoga, sankhya, vedant* and *ayurveda*) is a boon for the mankind and is respected everywhere." He believed in having separate schools or gurukuls for girls, which were to be run exclusively by women staff only. Their marriage should not be allowed to take place until the time they return from their academy on the termination of their educational training.

He was also against the age old prejudices, which were prevalent in his times, about the education of women and *shudras* (स्त्री शूद्रौ नाधीयातामिति श्रुतेः) and as such, he declared in unambiguous terms that all human beings, whether men or women have a right to study. "Blessed are the men and women", he observed¹⁰, "whose mind is engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, who are of amiable

disposition and polite manners, who observe the rules of veracity and other virtues, who are free from pride and impurity, who destroy others' vices, who are adorned with the jewels of the advocacy of truth, who alleviate the sufferings of humanity in the world by the inculcation of knowledge and who do good to others by means of works ordained by the *Vedas*".

"Like boys who acquire perfect Knowledge, and good training by observing the vow of chastity and, when of age, marry maidens, youthful, educated, lovely, suitable, equal to them; let girls also acquire perfect knowledge and the best training by studying the *Vedas* and other scriptures during their vow of chastity and, attaining puberty and full majority, marry bachelors, youthful, handsome, educated and equal to them (sic)"¹¹. On the question of what should women learn, he believed¹² that the Brahmin and warrior class women should learn all branches of knowledge, the merchant class women should acquire commercial knowledge, and the servile class women should know the culinary art and the duties of service. Like men, who must at least learn something of grammar, religion, and ethics, women should also learn grammar, religion, medicine, arithmetic, handicraft, as a matter, of course. "For without the knowledge of these arts," he further said, "they cannot distinguish right from wrong, behave themselves agreeably towards the husbands and other relatives, beget children properly, nurture them, bring them up and train them well, perform the domestic chores done as they ought to be done, cook or superintend the cooking of food, and prepare drink like medicine according to the method prescribed by the medical art, so that disease may not attack the household, and all the inmates live happily". Dayanand also wished that the students, whether male or female, should take an oath, to marry only after completing their studies¹³.

He was also aware of the frequent quarrels and other unhappy situations encountered by the uneducated wives and educated husbands in their day today lives and the incongruities that crept in such marriages. Commenting on these situations, Dayanand remarked that¹⁴, "if the master of a house be educated and his wife uneducated or vice versa, there will every day be a war between gods and devils in the house. How can there be joy in it? Without knowledge a woman cannot discharge the domestic duties properly, such as the management of the household, just treatment of all, duties of married life, mutual satisfaction of husband and wife, domestic work under the control of the mistress of a house, and similar other duties".

His deep concern for the deplorable position of women, motivated the members of the *Samaj* to open up new schools, libraries, *Vanita ashrams*, beside opposing vehemently the prevalent social abuses like child marriages, ill-matched or uneven marriages, polygamy, etc. Thus by the above description, it becomes quite clear that Dayanand Saraswati was a true champion of women's cause and his views on women's education were truly revolutionary. In the social history of India, he will always be remembered as a crusader who fought

vehemently for the women's rights and sacrificed his own life fighting against the prevalent social evils.

Reference

1. For a detailed study of Swami Dayanand's stay and work in the States of Rajputana, please refer to Vidyalkar, Satyaketu, *Arya Samaj ka Itihaas*, Vol.I and II, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, N. Delhi, 1984; and Bawa, Chhajju Singh, *Life and Teachings of Swami Dayanand*, Dayanand Sansthan, Delhi, 1997.
2. It appears that there is some confusion about the date and year of Dayanand's first shastrartha, in the Rajputana. According to Bawa Chhajju Singh (*The Life and Teachings...*, p. 164), the first shastrartha that Dayanand held was with Rev. Mr. Grey, Rev. Mr. Robinson, and Rev. Mr. Schoolbred of Beawar (Ajmer), on 28th of Nov. 1878, at Ajmer. While, Satyaketu Vidyalkar (*Arya Samaj ka Itihaas*, Vol.II, p.405) has written that it was held at Ajmer, in 1865, with John Tobson.
3. For a detailed study of Swami Dayanand's social philosophy regarding these subjects, please see the English translation of *Satyartha Prakash*, written by Durga Prasad and entitled *Satyartha Prakash -The Light of Truth*, published by Dayanand Sansthan, Ved mandir, Delhi-36.
4. Ibid. p.viii.
5. Ibid.
6. *Chanakya Niti*, Cited from (Cf.) Prasad, Durga, *Satyartha Prakash-The Light of Truth*, Ibid. p. 38.
7. *Manu Samhita*, VII.152.
8. Prasad, Durga, op.cit., pp.74-75.
9. Ibid.
10. युवा सुवासाः परिवीत आगात्स उ श्रेयान भवति जायमानः। तं धीरासः कवय उन्नयन्ति स्वाध्यो मनसा देवयंतः।।
11. "ब्रह्मचार्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिं।।" *Atharva Veda*, K.11, pt.24, Ad.3, verse 18., Cf. Prasad, Durga, *Satyartha Prakash-The Light of Truth*, Ibid., p.73.
12. Ibid. pp.74-75. "In intellectual education," he remarked, "their study should satisfy the five great canons, namely, the laws of spirits, the laws of nature, the wisdom of sages, the eight-fold evidence of logic, and the voice of conscience. The eight-fold evidence of logic consists of perception, inference, analogy, Holy Writ, history, the converse, possibility, and non-existence. In other words, their study should include both physics and metaphysics, as relating to the six categories of existence, namely, substance, quality, action, agreement, difference, and causation". To raise the educational standard to the ancient greatness of *Aryavarta*, the scheme of Studies, as desired by him, should consist of *Ashtadhyayi*, *Nighantu*, *Nirukta*, selections from *Manu*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, six schools of philosophy, (viz. *Mimansa*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaishesik*, *Sankhya*,

and Vedant), ten Upanishads, (viz. *Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundak, Mandukya, Aitareya, Tatireya, Chhandogya, and Brahdaranyak*), four Vedas (*Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva*), four *Brahmanas*, Astronomy, *Suryasiddhanta*, Music, *Narad Samhita, Arthaveda* or politics and 4 Military Art. ”

13. “पूर्वीरहं शरदः शश्रमाणा दोषा वस्तोरुषसो
जरयन्तीः। मिनाति श्रियं जरिमा तनुनामप्यु नु
पत्नीवृषणो जगम्युः।” i.e. “I shall marry after

having attained full growth and vigour of mind and body, and acquired perfect knowledge and moral training in accordance with rules of studentship, so as to obtain good old age when days and nights mar the beauty and weaken the strength of the body by pushing it on to decline of life just as they deprive previous autumns and fading twilights of their charm.” Cf. Prasad, Durga, *Satyartha Prakash -The Light of Truth*, Ibid. p.83.

14. Ibid.p.73.