



## **RELIGION, FREEDOM AND NATION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SWAMI DAYANAND AND MAHATAMA GANDHI**

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### **Abstract**

*The present paper is an attempt to understand the concept of Nation, Freedom and Religion in the philosophy of Swami Dayanand. Swami Dayanand is considered as one of the most significant and seminal thinkers and reformers of 19<sup>th</sup> century India. Swami Dayanand had revolutionary ideas regarding nation, freedom and religion and contributed significantly to the reshaping of Indian society and its thinking. By establishing Arya Samaj, instilled among Indians the sense of superiority, understanding of a rich cultural heritage and united them in one thread of nationalism. His message of going back to Vedas made Indians realize their deep cultural roots. His views significantly inspired later thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi who employed the spirit of nationalism awakened by Swami Dayanand in Indian freedom struggle. Gandhi's views on religion, freedom and nationalism were more or less like those of Swami Dayanand. Like Dayananda he too believed in and stood for swaraj that is self rule. Gandhi also was a nationalist but his nationalism was more inclusive, rather it can be called as internationalism.*

### **Introduction**

India has produced great thinkers and reformers like Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Madan Mohan Malviya whose thought and work changed the fate of the Indian society. Around 70 years after independence, India is still in the twilight zone of political turmoil, economic imbalance, social turbulence and ideological confusion. We as a nation have not been able to play our part in the national and international affairs despite our invaluable culture, enormous population and diverse natural resources.

Swami Dayanand was a revolutionary reformist of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Born in 1824, he contributed significantly to the development of India so much so that former President of India, S. Radhakrishnan, called him 'one of the makers of Modern India'. Swami Dayanand was very much aware of the social, moral and religious degradation of their country in the late nineteenth century and he took revolutionary steps to introduce drastic reforms such as widow remarriage, the abolition of child marriages, and of the custom of *Sati*. The young

Dayanand was disillusioned with the classical Hinduism and became a wandering monk. Through the power of reasoning even as a teenager he denounced rituals such as idol worship. To him, such beliefs could not conform to the true attributes of God.

### **The Philosophy of Swami Dayanad**

In British times the country was in a deplorable state and was ridden with immense poverty. The Hindu society was fragmented by religion, sect and language. Evil customs like untouchability, prohibition on education of women, *sati* and child marriage were prevalent. Realizing the grim situation of the times, Swami Dayanand founded the *Arya Samaj* in 1875 with an aim to remove the sufferings of humanity. The *Arya Samaj* criticized and condemned idol-worship, pilgrimages, priest craft, offerings made in temples, the caste system, untouchability, child marriage, and discrimination against women, on the ground that all these lacked Vedic sanction. It discouraged dogmas and encouraged skepticism in beliefs that run contrary to common sense and logic. The *Arya Samaj* was termed as the 'Universal Church' and it gave the call of one God- *OM*, one religion – Vedic Dharma, one scripture- Vedas, one Caste *Arya*, one method of worship- *Sadhna*. He preached this religion throughout his life and gave many messages. For instance he said, "To stick to the truth at all costs, steadily rises in virtues. When his virtues raise his reputation and prestige, he becomes all the more an unerring source of power and greatness." He preached that Hindus should worship just one formless God and rejected polytheism by telling people the true meaning of the names of God (*Paramatma*), the supreme self.

The main message of Swami Dayanand was of going *Back to Vedas*. As any great seer would do, he quickly grasped the notion that the Vedas were the very first revealed books of the mankind via the Vedas to live according to Vedas. Believing that the Vedas were the only authoritative word of God, he concluded that the post – Vedic scriptures were sectarian in nature and were not of the same quality as the elucidation of *mantras* in the Vedas done by the great *Rishis* of past. Being a logician, Swami Dayanand logically described the true religion and asserted that his sole aim in criticizing the views of others was to arrive at truth.

Swami Dayanand stood tallest amongst all men in denouncing the evil practices prevalent at that time in the name of religion. *Satyarth Prakash*-the light of truth, deals with many topics which he delivered in public discourses on, ranging from God, family, politics, education, diet and so forth. Swami Dayanand firmly believed that "If all religions were the same there would be harmony, but since they all oppose each other there can only ever be one true religion." Therefore, he worked tirelessly towards bringing everyone under the Vedic banner. According to him, religion comprises of 3 things: Equitable Dealings, the

Acceptance of Truth and the Rejection of Falsehood. A person who accepts the trust but does not follow the true conduct of life is not religious. Swami Dayanand believed in one almighty, formless omnipresent God.

For Gandhi also religion was not confined within the narrow boundaries of the rules and rituals, customs and caste-restrictions of one's own sect. He loved and cherished Hinduism; but did not follow it blindly. According to Gandhi his religion was Hinduism which, for him, was the religion of humanity; and it included all the religions known to him. Gandhi said, "Religion not in the conventional but in the broadest sense helps me to have a glimpse of the Divine Essence. This glimpse is impossible without full development of the moral sense. Here religion and morality are, for me, synonymous terms." Gandhi said for Hinduism "I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions..." and it "believed in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives."

Swami Dayanand was a staunch supporter of freedom. When Colonialism was the order of the day, Swami Dayanand dreamt of complete independence, political as well as cultural for the country. He taught the importance of *Swaraj* (self rule) to the downtrodden and exploited Indian people. In *Yajurvedabhashya* he says, "People should constantly strive to free themselves from the bonds of slavery and should vigilantly maintain their independence." Swami Dayanand put forth the idea of *Swaraj* in the sense of having an independent sovereign state. He not only prayed for *Swaraj* and for its advancement but also gave a turn to the political awakening in the nineteenth century India. He is deemed as the first visionary to have the vision of united India which he called *Aryavarta* and the first protagonist of the cause of *Swadeshi*. Swami Dayanand gave a new impetus to Indian nationalism. The very establishment of *Arya Smaj* in 1875 at Bombay worked as a stimulus to India nationalism. It aimed at the creation of an India nation not by the influence of western civilization, education and religion but by establishing an India religion and culture common to all Indians. From religious, cultural and political points of view, he gave an indigenous orientation to India nationalism. His choice of the Vedas of ancient India to weaken the western influence became a great force in arousing the spirit of Nationalism in India.

In the same vein, 'freedom' to Gandhi was more than an external political transfer of power; it was meant to be internal freedom which must be earned by self-effort and preserved through spiritual self-discipline". Gandhi used politics, but only as his practical work-field or *karma-bhumi*, to practice spirituality. He saw no dichotomy between politics and religion. By *Swaraj*, he meant freedom and self-rule which should be practiced at three levels - (i) in case of individual *Swaraj*, it is self-control or *Swaraj* of the self. (2) in case of the country, it is the

freedom of India from the British clutch, and (3) in case of community level, it is *Gram Swaraj* or freedom of village. Gandhi fought in his own unique way with the mightiest moral-spiritual weapon of *satyagraha*, based on nonviolent courage and adherence to truth. He spoke of political freedom as "external" and spiritual freedom as "internal"; thus implying a duality.

Swami Dayanand had a fervent love for India's own language. English in his opinion was a poison which was destroying the India life. He directed his followers to spread and promote Hindi. Following him the *Arya Samajis* began to consider it their supreme duty to spread the *Arya Bhasha* throughout the length and breadth of India. It won't be wrong to say that Swami fostered the rise of nationalism through vernacular movement. He was a product of Sanskrit learning and became a famous scholar of Sanskrit. Thus the writing and preaching's of Swami Dayanand gave an impetus to the growth of India Nationalism by making Hindi or *Arya Bhasha* the universal language of India.

Swami Dayanand was the most charismatic Indian spiritual leader of the nineteenth century as who inspired the later thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi in the twentieth century. The thought patterns and teachings of both Swami Dayanand and Gandhi share a lot of similarities and if we look the matter in the right perspective, Mahatma Gandhi carried forward the work for reform and revitalization of India which Swami Dayanand left unfinished. The greatest challenge India is facing today, is the crisis of confidence and character, mental and moral decay and break down of traditional ethos. The inspiring call to the nation given by Swami Dayanand and later by Mahatma Gandhi may lead India towards a bright future.

### **Conclusion**

Among the religious and political leaders and social reformers of modern India, Swami Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi occupy an exalted place and will go down in history as the greatest patriots. Swami Dayanand in the nineteenth century- a century that heralded the dawn of Indian renaissance, and Gandhi in 20<sup>th</sup> century, a century that reshaped the Indian nation. Their adherence to India, culture, religion, language and education were the four walls on which the large building of nationalism was built. Swami's tireless efforts proved that India nationalism was to be no beggar at anybody's door. India has her own priceless heritage to offer anybody who has anything to contribute to her regeneration. What is most unfortunate is that there has been a rapid decline in the moral and ethical values both at the individual and collective levels. But as Swami Dayanand and Gandhi pinned their faith in

individuals, not institutions, one has reasons to hope that the more enduring aspects of their lives and work will continue to inspire the people in the days to come.

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