

Women's Rights, Education, Empowerment - The Significant Contribution of Dayanand Saraswati

Dr. Sambodh Goswami

Associate Professor, Dept. of History, SPNKS Govt. PG College, Dausa, Rajasthan, India

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. Swami Dayanand was one of the most powerful figures of modern India, who through the *Arya Samaj*, played an important part in the Indian renaissance. The following research paper highlights the views of Dayanand Saraswati on women's emancipation through education 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 rights , social reformer.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important and extensive social reform movements (the Arya Samaj movement) 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. 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 unequal 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. [1,2,3]

The following research paper highlights the views of Dayanand Saraswati on education and especially women education , which had a direct relationship with women's empowerment ,as it was connected 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.¹

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 declared ², " 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 once ³, "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."

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization) / | Impact Factor: 1.672 |

| A Monthly Peer Reviewed & Referred Journal |

Vol. 2, Issue 12, December 2013

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*,⁴ "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*⁵, 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,⁶ "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 [4,5,6]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 remarked⁷, "and who has read the *vedangs* (i.e. *shiksha, kalpa, vyakarana, nirukta, chhanda* and *vyotish*) 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* (L=h'kwzks uk/kh;krkfejr Jqrs%) 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 observed⁸, "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)."⁹ On the question of what should women learn, he believed¹⁰ 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

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization) / | Impact Factor: 1.672 |

| A Monthly Peer Reviewed & Referred Journal |

Vol. 2, Issue 12, December 2013

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 studies¹¹.

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 that¹², "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.¹³ Thus by the above description, it becomes quite clear that Dayanand Saraswati was a true champion of women's emancipation and empowerment^[7,8,9] 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 who sacrificed his own life fighting against the prevalent social evils.

It is remarkable that in the Indian society of late 19th century, various social reformers and reform associations, including the Arya Samaj, were working to put an end to the sorrows of the women and highlighted the deplorable condition of the women in the Indian society and became successful in the eradication of some of them. But it is also worthy to be mentioned here that the impact of Arya Samaj was much more felt in western and northern India than any other such reform association. The impact of most of the reform associations was confined to a particular region like Bengal or Maharashtra, while the works of the Arya Samaj influenced a major part of western and northern India (including those portions that are now a part of Pakistan). The works of the Arya Samaj in northern India and especially in Rajputana, influenced the enlightened persons of various castes in Rajputana, who took upon themselves to correct what was wrong in their communities.¹⁴

It is also significant to note that the Arya Samaj advocated widow remarriages and despite of the prejudices against it in the society, the Samaj relentlessly worked for it. It forced people to think over the pitiable condition of the widows and motivated them to work for their cause. It successfully organized many widow remarriages and because of the arguments forwarded for their remarriage, many enlightened persons came forward to support this movement.

Similarly, the Arya Stree Samajes, established by Arya Samaj and which functioned in various cities of India, not only took upon themselves the responsibility of discarding certain prevalent social evils, publicly and privately, but also took an active part in educating the women and helped in instilling in them a love for their own country.¹⁵ Many Samajist women, beside waging a crusade against certain social evils, also took an active part in the struggle against the unjust policies of their local feudal lords and also in the freedom struggle of India against the then British government. They braved the abuses and lathis, insults and humiliations, rough treatment of the police and even went to prisons with their husbands, with their few months old children, their mother in laws, sister in laws, in the various Satyagrahas. It is important to note that on the call of the Arya Samaj, many of the Samajist women (from Shekhawati in Rajputana and other places), even went to Hyderabad to participate in the Satyagraha against the then Nawab.

It is my humble submission that had Arya Samaj not worked for the upliftment of the status of women, had it not worked to educate them and pulled them out of the shadows of men, had it not changed the mentality of men towards the so called "weaker section" of the society, Mahatma Gandhi would not have been successful in motivating them to join the independence movement in large numbers. [10,11,12] It was Arya Samaj which instilled and imbued in the

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization) / | Impact Factor: 1.672|

| A Monthly Peer Reviewed & Referred Journal |

Vol. 2, Issue 12, December 2013

hearts and minds of women that they were not 'abla' or weak and that they were strong enough to contribute their part in the freedom struggle. Unfortunately, historiography has not given much emphasis on this significant and peculiar contribution of Arya Samaj in the freedom struggle of India and has labeled it as a communal organization. The Arya Samaj levelled the field, cleared all the thorns and provided Mahatma Gandhi a smooth ground to lay the foundation of his mass movements against the British. [13,14,15]

REFERENCES

1. For a detailed study of Swami Dayanand's social philosophy and specially his role in the empowerment of women, please see Goswami, Sambodh, *Voicing the Unvoiced (Women's Questions and Arya Samaj)*, YKING Publications, Jaipur, 2016. For a detailed and authentic study of Swami Dayanand's life, his work and his tour in India, 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. 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. And also, the English translation of *Satyarth* Prakash, written by Durga Prasad and entitled *Satyarth* Prakash - *The Light of Truth*, published by Dayanand Sansthan, Ved mandir, Delhi-36.
2. Prasad, Durga, *Satyarth* Prakash - *The Light of Truth*, ibid. p.viii.
3. Ibid.
4. *Chanakya Niti*, Cited from (now onwards Cf.) Prasad, Durga, *Satyarth* Prakash - *The Light of Truth*, Ibid. p.38.
5. *Manu Samhita*, VII.152.
6. Prasad, Durga, op.cit., pp.74-75.
7. Ibid.
8. "qok lqoklk% ifjohr vkxkRI m Js;ku Hkofr tk;eku% A ra /khjkl% do; mUu;fUr Lok;/ks eulk nso;ar% AA"
9. "czáp;:sZ.k dU;k ;qokua foUnrs ifraAA" *Atharva Veda*, K.11, pt.24, Ad.3, verse 18., Cf. Prasad, Durga, *Satyarth* Prakash - *The Light of Truth*, Ibid., p.73.
10. 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."
11. "iwohZjga 'k'jn% 'k'Jek.kk nks"kk oLrks:"klks tj;Urh% A feukfr fJ;az tfjek ruqukeI;w uq iRuho`Z" k.kksa txE;q%AA" 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, *Satyarth* Prakash - *The Light of Truth*, Ibid. p.83.
12. Ibid. p.73.



ISSN(Online) : 2319-8753

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)/ | Impact Factor: 1.672|

| A Monthly Peer Reviewed & Referred Journal |

Vol. 2, Issue 12, December 2013

13. For a detailed study of Swami Dayanand's social philosophy and specially his role in the empowerment of women, please see Goswami ,Sambodh, Voicing the Unvoiced (Women's Questions and Arya Samaj), YKing Publications,Jaipur,2016.

14. *ibid.*

15. *ibid.*