SWAMI DAYANAND VERSUS UNTOUCHABILITY: AN EVALUATION OF HIS REFORMATORY IDEAS

OM PRAKASH, Lecturer in History,

Babu Shobh Ram government Arts College ALWAR (Rajsthan)

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, was a pivotal figure in the socio-religious reform movements of 19th-century India. He ardently opposed the practice of untouchability, advocating for social equality and the upliftment of marginalized communities. Dayanand's reformatory ideas were rooted in his interpretation of Vedic texts, which he believed emphasized the inherent dignity of all human beings.

Dayanand's opposition to untouchability stemmed from his belief that all people are descendants of the same divine source. He argued that caste distinctions, particularly those that enforced untouchability, were not supported by the Vedas. In his view, the rigid caste system was a social construct that deviated from the true teachings of Hinduism. He asserted that every individual, regardless of their birth or societal status, possesses an inherent right to dignity and respect. Dayanand's doctrine insisted that adherence to Vedic principles would lead to the abolition of social inequalities, including the banishment of untouchability.

One of Dayanand's most significant contributions was the emphasis on education as a tool for social reform. He believed that ignorance perpetuated the caste system and untouchability. By promoting education for all, including those who were considered untouchables, Dayanand aimed to empower individuals with knowledge and skills, enabling them to rise above oppressive societal norms. The Arya Samaj, under his leadership, established schools and institutions that focused on providing quality education, fostering a spirit of equality and brotherhood among all castes.

Dayanand's views on inter-caste marriage also reflect his reformatory stance against untouchability. He encouraged individuals to marry beyond their caste lines to promote social integration and to challenge the hierarchical structure of society. By advocating for inter-caste marriages, Dayanand sought to break down the barriers created by the caste system, emphasizing that love and companionship transcend social divisions. This progressive idea was radical for his time, as inter-caste marriages were often met with severe social stigma and opposition.

Moreover, Dayanand's critiques of religious orthodoxy and superstitions also played a role in addressing untouchability. He condemned practices that supported discrimination and advocated for a rational understanding of spirituality devoid of caste-based prejudices. By encouraging people to seek knowledge and truth through the study of the Vedas, Dayanand aimed to foster a society where respect for all individuals is paramount, irrespective of caste or social standing.

However, Dayanand's ideas were not universally accepted. His reformist agenda faced resistance from orthodox sections of society, who saw his views as a direct threat to their power and social order. The entrenched beliefs about purity and pollution remained deeply embedded in Indian society, making the complete eradication of untouchability a formidable challenge even beyond Dayanand's lifetime.

Untouchability, which conveys a sense of defilement and pollution, is very much related to the caste system. It is mostly viewed from the principle of as old as the caste system. The caste Hindus were in search of an ideology which could help in resolving the contradiction of the existing system. Swami Dayanand, who had already established an organization known as the Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875. The message of the founder of the Arya Samaj carried a severe criticism of the various religious whose upcoming had reduced Hinduism to a religious of a section of Indians. He condemned the existing practices of the Hindu society which divided them into numerous groups and sub-groups. Dayanand firmly opined that the only hope of survival of society rested with the idea of going back to the Vedic system. Swami Dayanand himself spoke on caste system. The caste distinction, according to Dayanand was not religious or natural distinction but a socio-economic institution. Swami Dayanand regarded the prevailing caste system of the Hindus as a degenerated and mutilated successor of once the pure varna system. The old varna was based upon quality, action and temperament of man1 castes were not created by God and salvation did not depend upon its observance.2 Thus to improve the social conditions and existing disparities swami Dayanand, with the help of other leaders, made an earnest effort to inculcate generous and broad structure of the teachings of the Arya Samaj to the contemporary society through his ideology.Thus, the present paper explores to evaluate his contribution towards elimination of untouchably

. To start with, he made persistent efforts to contact the like minded leaders, people and activists. The inception of Dayanand's ideas and thought dated back to his early childhood

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experience and his pupil-hood with Swami Virjanand. It was his guess, who made him aware of the prevailing ignorance, darkness and orthodoxy, which he thought was a creation of Brahminical Hinduism.3 As a consequence of this there existed numerous groups and sub-groups being formed on the basis of rigid caste rules and sanction leading to the practice of untouchability, and other social evils. The presence of a large number of such practices had probably shaken the Hindu society and Dayanand found Hinduism to be losing its roots. The root cause of this as believed by Dayanand himself, was the ignorance of teachings of the Vedas. The existing inequalities of social status based on caste, was believed to be an outcome of Brahminical traditions prevalent in the society.4 He criticised Brahminical traditions and described a Brahmin as the one who prevented other people from acquiring knowledge. Not only this but with the help of false teachings he (the Brahmin) prevented the association of men with the men of learning, ensnaring them into their own nets. Thus a Brahmin ruled them physically, mentally and materially. The whole process indicated in the traditions was organized in view of the fear of Brahminas', owned hypocrisy being exposed if others acquired knowledge as a consequence of which they would have lost grip over others.5 On the contrary, Dayanand on the basis of a Yazur Veda verse said that all could acquire knowledge, including the members of four varnas, women, servants and even the lowest of the low.6 On the question of caste system, Dayanand asserted that the existing explanations of the system were wrong. The Yajur Veda verse, widely read and interpreted as Brahimin born of God's mouth; the Kshetraya out of his arms; Vaishya out of his thighs; and Shudra of his feet had been described and declared wrong by him7. Hence Dayananda defined Brahimins as one who possess the above listed qualifications and accomplishments. To be a kshatriya, one was to have the qualifications such as the ability to protect people by the administration of perfect justice without fear or favour; to spend money in promoting the cause of truth and justice and in advancing knowledge and serving the deserving, to perform home and yagya, to study the Vedas and shastras; to shun the allurements of sensual delight; to be fearless in fighting with enemies; to be bold and dignified and free from all weaknesses, to be firm in resolution and cool under difficulties; to be clever in discharging public duties and finally to be liberal minded.8

At the same time possibility of a Brahmin becoming a Shudra was not ruled out. And according to Dayanand, only those Brahmins who discharged their duties properly could be called Brahmins even if one was born in a Brahmin family and did not discharge his duties

properly, he would be relegated to the class lower of his own. A shudra who performed his duties well could rise to the status of Brahmin.9

According to Dayanand the varna of a person was to be determined by character, association and good and bad samskars manners. Truth, self-sacrifice, knowledge of God and Vedas, and cleanliness lead a Sudra to enter into higher varna. The corollary of it was that untruth, ignorance of Vedas and uncleaniliness could degrade a higher varna members to a Sudra varna. A Brahmin can become untouchable if he is not clean. On the other hand a shudra can become to touchable if he is clean. He hold it is cleanliness which removes untouchability.10 On the question of the practice of untouchability in Hindu society in the past, Dayanand denied its very existence in the vedic period.11 The words such as Arya and Dasyu stood for different meaning and did not constitute a caste. According to the Vedas anyone obeying the command of God was an Arya and a wicked person was called a dasyu. Even historically, these two words were described to be of qualifying nature and denoted quality of the individual untouchability had been further described as a creation of Modern Brahiminical Hinduism.

In summary, Swami Dayanand Saraswati's reformatory ideas marked a significant departure from traditional views on caste and untouchability. His emphasis on education, inter-caste relations, and a return to Vedic teachings laid the groundwork for a more inclusive society. Though his ideas met with resistance and did not lead to immediate widespread change, they ignited discussions on social justice and equality that continue to resonate in contemporary India. Dayanand's legacy remains vital in the fight against caste-based discrimination and serves as a beacon for social reformers today.

It may be concluded with the given facts and critical analysis that Dayananda's contribution in the removal of untouchability is undoubtedly remarkable and worth consideration. he re-defined the established norms of absurd and illogical caste-difference in the society and ignited a torch of awareness among the mass.

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