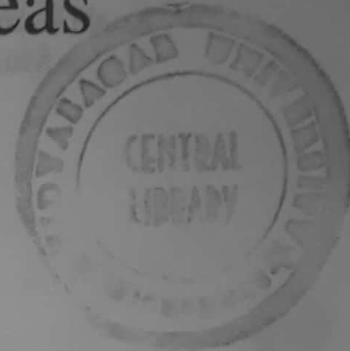


DAYANANDA SARASVATI  
His Life and Ideas

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DELHI  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
CALCUTTA CHENNAI MUMBAI  
1997

## CHAPTER XII

# A Dynamic View of Swami Dayananda

### A. THE THEOLOGIAN: GOD AND THE *Vedas*

When Dayananda left his home his concept of God was probably still vague, but it contained two important characteristics: his Shaivite background had imprinted on his mind the profound idea of a personal God enshrined in the numinous figure of Shiva, and an abhorrence of Vaishnavite mythology.<sup>1</sup> His first study of Advaita as a *sannyāsī* then convinced him of the identity of *brahman* and *ātman*. However, this inquiry was not very deep; his limited knowledge of Sanskrit restricted him to rudimentary texts, and his temperamental preference for practice over theory cut this study short. He soon turned to the cultivation of Yoga, which dominated his next ten years of wandering. His passion was not for speculation but for the mastery of techniques that would bring spiritual fulfilment. This blissful goal seems to have eluded the pilgrim, but on that long road his assiduous practice of Yoga made him into a man of astounding physical and mental power.

Dayananda's period in Mathura as a pupil of Virjananda brought back to the fore his earlier monotheism with its strong Shaivite tinge, no doubt partly as a reaction to the stifling Vaishnavite atmosphere of that city of Krishna. In subsequent years of study this monotheism was gradually purged of all its Purānic and Shaivite elements, and combined with some Advaitic notions. Although *sat-chit-ānanda* was now declared to be the proper name of God, it did not signify an impersonal entity, but was another name for *parameshwar*, the Lord. Thus arose an uneasy compromise between theism and monism, for the Swami still held the doctrines of the fundamental identity of *brahman* and *ātman* and of the ultimate unreality of the world. These two doctrines were repudiated by him during his years in the Doab, and he arrived at the basic tenets of his monotheism: God is a

transcendent person, distinct from the world and the souls, original creator of all, and through his power immanent in all creation.

The lofty monotheism of Debendranath's *Brahmo Dharma Satyārth Prakāsh*. He adopted the Maharshi's formula that made it possible to describe God as both *sa-guna* and *nir-guna*: the *gunas* in the first term refer to perfect qualities and those in the second to finite ones. Thus some more lingering traces of monism were eliminated. The greatest theological difficulty Dayananda then faced was that of conceiving between God and the non-divine a relationship that did not in any way impair God's perfection. This problem was complicated by the fact that the Swami then held that cosmos and *jīvas* were originally created out of God's infinite potentiality, a doctrine probably also influenced by Debendranath. The derivation of the created world from God's potentiality did confuse the distinction between God and his creation. The Swami adopted the old principle of *bhedābheda* to deal with this delicate point: God and his potentiality are in a *bhedābheda* relation. In one way God's potentiality is not distinct from him, and therefore God is the real material cause of the universe; but, at the same time, the two are also distinct, and therefore one cannot say that the Lord himself was transformed into the universe.

Discussions with Christian missionaries made Dayananda feel that this solution was not a satisfactory one. It was in his subsequent study of Sāmkhya and of Nyāya-Vaisheshika that he discovered the elements that helped him formulate his final doctrine of *traitavāda*: the cosmos as *prakṛiti*, and also the *jīvas* are co-eternal with God. Thus the intricate problem of their origination completely evaporated; nevertheless, according to the Swami, they remain utterly dependent on God in their evolution.

This gradual development of Dayananda's concept of God clearly shows that basically he always adhered to the monotheism he inherited in his youth. Although monism influenced his thought for a while, its impact was not very deep, and the Swami progressively freed himself of all monistic ideas. Three external sources of influence were at work in this process: the Swami's discussions with missionaries, the impact of Debendranath's *Brahmo Dharma*, and concepts of Sāmkhya and Nyāya-Vaisheshika. Sāmkhya contributed the idea of the co-eternity of the three



ultimate substances, and Nyāya-Vaisheshika helped shape the idea of God's activity in the processes of creation.

On the Swami's side, the primary force directing his thinking was his concern to develop an idea of God that would rule out even the slightest imperfection, and yet would safeguard God's personality. That is why he retained the simple *sat-chit-ānanda* formula, why he eliminated the concept of *sāmarthya*, and why he persistently denied any historical divine intervention in the affairs of the cosmos and the souls. However, this negative process of dissociating God from all possible imperfections led to a final conception that constitutes an uneasy compromise between theism and deism. God pervades and sustains the cosmos, and dispenses the fruits of *karma*, but in both these functions he somehow remains at a distance, uninvolved, as the eternal divine architect of the physical laws of the universe and of the moral law of retribution. There is no doubt that in the Swami's personal devotion and in his devotional works God is much nearer and dearer, but Dayananda did not succeed in integrating that personal closeness of a loving and concerned Lord into his theological structure, which remained a syncretic amalgam of basic tenets without profound integration.

This lack of integration shows up in one particular aspect of Dayananda's theology. Although he was obsessed by the idea of a completely infinite and independent divinity, he ended up with a God who in a certain way needs the world as much as the world needs him. God's relationship with the world is the only sphere in which he can fulfil his 'natural' powers and attributes of omnipotence, mercy, and justice. Creation, preservation, and salvation, said the Swami, are the 'natural' functions of God, just as seeing is the natural function of the eyes.<sup>2</sup>

Dayananda was hampered in his theological thinking by his complete inability to grasp the value and meaning of myth and symbol in the elucidation of the sacred. To him only pure rationality was acceptable in the realm of theology. This radical rationalism prevented him from appreciating the depths of the theological speculations of Hindu thinkers like Rāmānuja or Madhva: in the Swami's eyes their attempts at plumbing the mysteries of God's love violated God's pure infinity. That same rationalism steered his mind also in the direction of a vague deism. Dayananda was no great theologian of the divine. After

all, his primary interest was never really directed towards the mysteries of God, but rather towards the strivings of man; the first period of his life he devoted to his personal search for *moksha*, and the second he dedicated to the regeneration of Hindu man and Hindu society.

The development of Dayananda's conception of the *Vedas*, so intimately attached to his name, was a very long and slow process. Firm foundations for it were laid in his youth. As a Kathiawari Shaivite he inherited a tradition which prided itself on its adherence to the most ancient aspects of Hinduism, the Vedic rites and the *Dharmashāstras*; as a youth he learned the *Yajurveda* by heart. But for the first twenty years of his adult life the *Vedas* had no place among his concerns.

It was Virjananda who turned Dayananda's mind again towards the ancient roots of Hinduism: he taught him that the authentic sources of pure Hinduism were contained in the most ancient works of the *rishis* alone. But the *guru* himself does not seem to have been clear as to exactly which these works were. Dayananda set himself the task of finding that out. In the seven years after leaving his *guru* he studied all the Hindu works he could find, and progressively decided to eliminate all *Tantras* and *Purānas*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Upanishads*, the *Manusmriti*, etc. Finally, around 1870, he crossed the *Brāhmanas* out too, and declared that the original revelation of God was contained only in the four *Samhitās*, the *Rig*, the *Yajur*, the *Sāma*, and the *Atharva*.

Thus Dayananda went much further than simply answering his *guru's* question as to which the books of the *rishis* were. He made a radical distinction between the four *Samhitās* as revelation of God transmitted through the *rishis*, and other works composed by the *rishis* themselves, which he regarded as authoritative only in a secondary way. But at that time he had as yet no definite ideas as to what exactly the *Vedas* contained and in what manner they revealed God's message.

It was in Calcutta that these problems forced themselves on the Swami's attention. Questions about 'revelation' had been considered by the Bengali reformers since the time of Rammohan Roy. They had thought about them in a wide context, as they were challenged by the claims of Christianity and Islam, 'religions of the book'. Their general conclusion had been to reject all



claims to exclusive revelation, and to accept that different religions presented in their sacred writ complementary aspects of a universal rational religion. From that premise followed their practical eclecticism in borrowing from different scriptures, an eclecticism carried to its greatest lengths by Keshub. In the seventies that universalistic and eclectic approach was being increasingly challenged by a newly emerging movement supporting Hindu pride and nationalism spearheaded by the Adi Brahmos, according to which Hinduism was not just one among equals in the brotherhood of world religions, but was superior to all the others.

It was his reflections about the ideas that confronted him in Calcutta that led the Swami to formulate his own particular concept of Vedic revelation by combining two separate doctrines. He adopted the view that true religion must come directly from God in the definite form of a book, and combined this with the dogma of the superiority of Hinduism. Authentic religion was revealed by God in the *Vedas*, which constituted the only real divine revelation. All the other books of Hinduism, and also the scriptures of other religions such as Islam and Christianity, were mere secondary works of human origin without any inherent authority. The Swami also insisted that the content of revelation was completely rational, and as such comprised of necessity all that was rationally true in all other religions which were the imperfect efforts of men.

Such a concept of revelation is not to be found in the Hindu tradition. Though it always recognized that the most ancient scriptures had a special authority, it tended to class together all the early works from the *Rigveda* to the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. Moreover, the Hindu tradition did not generally look upon that great collection as necessarily comprising the final word, but often accepted an ongoing process of revelation in new eras in many later works such as the hymns of the early *bhakti* teachers of South India, the *Purānas*, the *Tantras*, and works of medieval *bhakti* saints. Dayananda's restrictive concept of true religion as the religion of the one book was no doubt inspired by the concept prevalent among Protestant missionaries. He accepted their premise of a divine revelation given once and for all time, and applied it to the four *Vedas*. But he went even further than any Christian fundamentalist would have dared to go by claiming that the *Vedas* contained the totality of all know-

ledge, spiritual, moral, social, political, and even scientific.

That is the conception Dayananda enshrined in his *Vedabhāshya*, which he considered his major contribution to knowledge and legacy to posterity. The *Bhāshya* has not played that vital role in the regeneration of Hinduism which Dayananda hoped it would, and has become to many of his followers an inert monument to which one occasionally pays tribute. However, the work still remains important to many as a symbol and a reminder of the material, cultural, and spiritual greatness of the Vedic Golden Age, and of the absolute superiority of Hinduism, both lasting ingredients of the spirit of Hindu nationalism.

#### B. THE MORALIST: MAN AND *Dharma*

Dayananda's first explicit theory of man was an advaitic one: the *ātman* is in the final instance identical with *brahman*, and the supreme goal of life is the realization of that identity. The *sannyāsī* who completely dedicates his life to the pursuit of that ideal is elevated above the restrictions of the *varna-dharma*. The Swami lived according to this ideal from the age of twenty-one to the age of thirty-six, when he went to study under Virjananda. During his stay in Mathura his attention was diverted from his own super-self and directed towards the humanity around him, as at the same time his theistic approach reasserted itself.<sup>3</sup>

This new view of life gradually led the Swami to deny the monistic identity of God and man, and to affirm that man's deepest essence, the *jīva*, though dependent on the Lord for its existence, was essentially distinct from God and always remained so. During the long years in the Doab, Dayananda's constant concern with morality made him reflect much on the essence of man and his relation to God. His subsequent reading of the *Brahmo Dharma* and his discussions with Bengali moral thinkers like A.K. Datta helped him to clarify his ideas.

A year after his visit to Calcutta the Swami formulated his first comprehensive view of man in his *Satyārth Prakāsh*. The *jīva*, created by God 'at the beginning', at the time of *ādisrishti*, remains a separate entity. Consciousness is his deepest essence, and he is linked to the gross body by the subtle body. The *jīva* is active, a free agent, and totally responsible for all his deeds. He peregrinates through successive lives until he reaches fulfilment



in the state of *moksha*. There he remains until 'the end of time', *atyant pralaya*, when he is reabsorbed with the whole cosmos into God's potentiality. This eschatology ascribes to the *jīva* some striking characteristics. The *jīva* is finite, having both a beginning and an end in time; he is essentially active and cosmic even in *moksha*, where he enjoys the bliss of emancipation through his subtle body which is a cosmic entity; he cannot act or exist without this connection, and when the cosmos is finally dissolved, both the *jīva* and his subtle body are included in that dissolution.

Thus Dayananda had now arrived at a concept of man radically different from the advaitic one: the deepest essence of man was to be active and cosmic. Yet there still remained what could be called an inconsistency, or a vestige of monism, in this conception: in *moksha* both *karma* and *avidyā* were totally destroyed. From this it logically followed that *moksha*, though it was restricted in time, was irreversible as a state, because the very seeds of *samsāra*, namely *karma* and *avidyā*, had been eliminated. Two considerations had moved the Swami to that conclusion. He applied the ancient Hindu principle that whatever has a beginning must also have an end. Secondly, his concern to safeguard the distinction between God and man, the infinite and the finite, made him adhere to the doctrine of the cosmic nature of man, even if this meant accepting man's eventual disappearance.

The second *Satyārth Prakāsh* propounds the Swami's final conception of man. His study of Sāmkhya and his discussions with missionaries had made him doubt the logical soundness of an initial creation out of God's potentiality. This led him to the doctrine of *traitavāda*: God, the cosmos, and the *jīvas* are eternal substances. But if one concedes to the *jīva* co-eternity with the Lord, how can one safeguard the basic distinction between the two? By linking man *eternally* to the cosmos and its tyranny of time and space this can be done, and Dayananda now realized that if man remained active and cosmic even in the state of *moksha*, then he also had to retain his freedom, and with his freedom the possibility of relapse. He therefore stated that man always remained bound to *karma* and that his knowledge always remained imperfect; these conditions would eventually bring man back from the state of *moksha* into the cycle of rebirth.

Two basic ideas were so dear to the Swami that he was prepared to go against the whole Hindu tradition in his new eschatology.



The first idea was the distinction between God and man, which had to be preserved at all cost. The second, and even more compelling concept was that man's salvation had to be achieved completely by his own works and by nothing else; moral action guided by reason was the one and only power effective in the process of salvation. Dayananda ruthlessly eliminated all other roads to *moksha*, all the short cuts, the easy rides, the instantaneous transformations that Hinduism had devised over the centuries. *Moksha* was to be earned by action alone, its achievement was regulated by the law of *karma*, an inexorably just law that man never escaped, not even in *moksha*. Although this law was administered by the Lord, he never interfered with it just as he never interfered with the physical laws of nature, for both these laws were perfect from the beginning.

The long and gradual emergence of Dayananda's final concept of man had an overall direction. Progressively it disentangled man from that basic identity with God which Advaita ascribes to him. In this process of disentanglement more and more stress was laid on the essential attributes of man: he is active, always free, and bound to cosmic existence. Freedom, activity, and involvement in the world constituted for Dayananda the basic nobility of man, the source of his greatness, for which he owes God gratitude, but for which he is wholly and solely responsible. Even the *sannyāsīs'* pride should lie in that, and not in an escape from the world.

Within the Hindu tradition this is a remarkable conception, indeed a unique one. No other Hindu theologian has elevated man's moral action to such a rank in the scale of human endeavour, far above the powers of ritualism, the raptures of mysticism, or the wondrous effectiveness of devotional love which are given a place of prominence in the Hindu theologies of *karma*, *jnāna*, and *bhakti*. This conception of man is no doubt Dayananda's greatest theoretical achievement and his main contribution to Hindu speculation. At the same time it is the most perfect expression of the Swami's own approach to life.

As Dayananda's vision of man evolved, his conception of *dharma* developed correspondingly. *Dharma* here is taken to refer to the complex of duties man has to perform to achieve his fulfilment. It was only after leaving Virjananda that the Swami

started to think about this question, and at first he adhered closely to traditional guidelines. As regards ritual duties, he taught a very traditional Vedic *Sandhyā*, and advocated the reading of some *Purānas* and the wearing of the Shaivite rosary. His main preoccupation in these years was still study, and the kind of *dharma* he preached was only a tentative choice from among the many available systems of conduct. He gradually came to discourage idol worship and all sectarian devotions. In the field of personal and social morality he still adhered to the *varnāshrama dharma* as stipulated by Manu, although he was conscious of its inadequacies.

It was during the years in the Doab, when the Swami was fully engaged in the work of reform, that his ideas on *dharma* started to mature. On the ritual side he now made a complete break with all non-Vedic practices and scriptures, advocating the performance of Vedic rites only. As his study of the *Vedas* deepened he completely opted for the pure Vedic ritual, and the propagation of that ritual to the exclusion of all other rites was to remain one of the major efforts throughout his life.

But even more important were his reflections on moral action. In his daily contact with people and his efforts to guide them he had to reflect on the ethics of concrete human behaviour. The individualism that was asserting itself in his Vedic interpretation also came to the fore in this sphere; he freed himself from the tyranny of the *Shāstras* and their commentaries, and judged the morality of actions on the basis of general principles he evolved himself. Manu had been his guide so far, but now he cut loose from that norm and accepted Manu's authority only when it was in agreement with reason. Thus we find the Swami now asserting basic moral principles, such as that food can only be polluted by impure ingredients or by the immorality of its acquisition; that good works are morally superior to the mere observance of ritual rules; that charity should be directed to the needy and not to useless temple-building; that *moksha* does not come from Ganga water, but from works. His important Kanpur declaration laid great stress on the basic moral attitudes that should guide man's life.

These reflections on ethics made Dayananda reject Manu's *varnāshrama dharma*. Denying any validity to the caste divisions of Hindu society, he replaced them by his system of the four classes,



allocated not by the accident of birth, but by the state according to each man's abilities and behaviour. By ascribing to the classes a purely secular status, he took away from the *Shāstras* that religious authority in caste matters that orthodoxy attached to them, which meant that all their statements had to be judged from the ethical point of view.

Two other doctrines of the Swami's reinforced this strong accent on moral action. He condemned the way of *nivritti*, renunciation of action, and stated that not even the *sannyāsī* was exempt from the fundamental commandment of positive moral action. The other doctrine was that sins cannot be forgiven; the law of karmic retribution allows for no exception as it is the basis of morality, and every single act must bear its own fruit. In this search for the roots of morality Dayananda was determined as an individual to challenge the taboos of Hindu social life; he repeatedly acted against them, and also exposed some of his followers to excommunication.

We can detect two major sources of influence on the Swami in his search for basic moral principles. First there was the example of the Sādhs: their simple moral code with its stress on basic attitudes and its freedom from ritual and superstitious regulations was a model for Dayananda. So too was the ethical teaching of Debendranath's *Brahmo Dharma*, with its emphasis on the three fundamental qualities of all morality: rationality, activity, and truthfulness.

By the time the Swami wrote his first *Satyārth Prakāsh* his own concept of *dharma* had fully matured. Man's ritual duties were domestic, sacramental, and public Vedic rites; and his social life was to be regulated by the authentic Vedic *varna-dharma*. The responsibility for the regulation of this lay with the state, but the whole programme basically depended on everyone living a morally good life. The very essence of this righteous life was the practice of virtue, for wisdom and truthfulness are the roots of justice, tolerance, and peace. Dayananda's moral man is consumed with a thirst for knowledge, he is self-controlled and ever-active, and guides his social relations by truth, justice, and tolerance. Although the state must be the guardian of *dharma*, the state's effectiveness depends on the righteousness of all its members, from the ruler to the commoner. It is this conception that made it impossible for the Swami to overlook the moral flaws of the ruler of Jodhpur.



Dayananda's deep sense of morality shows itself in his balanced treatment of the major aspects of human relationships. To him marriage should be a permanent union where partners share everything; a full education is the right of every man; the state must bear wide social responsibilities; foreign travel is excellent, because 'evil springs from the heart, not from the location'; food and interdining taboos are valueless, because 'there is no direct connection between eating and drinking and *dharma*'; non-violence is not an absolute law, but must be judged in accordance with the greatest benefit to all. The only weak points in the Swami's treatment of moral issues were two: his doctrine of *niyoga* betrayed the inability of the *sannyāsī* to fully comprehend the sexual aspects of life; and in his remarks on the state of *sannyāsa* he had not yet fully drawn the radical conclusions of his premises.

The second *Satyārth Prakāsh* changed little in this concept of *dharma*, but there was a development in two areas. The Swami took away all the residual privileges of the *sannyāsī* and put him on an equal footing with every other human being; the only thing that should distinguish him was a more radical dedication to work for the good of all mankind. The second edition also exhibits a deeper concern for the lower ranks of society: the *shūdras* had hitherto been excluded from the study of the *Vedas*; now the Swami declared that as human beings they had as much right to that study as anybody else. There was one other new development in the later years of the Swami's life. During his search for true morality in those years in the Doab, Dayananda had not shrunk from offending orthodox taboos and exposing his followers to the punitive sanctions such offences entailed. Now, although he did not reject the principle that these taboos had no religious or authoritative value, he became careful not to break them, and he urged his Aryas to be similarly cautious. This constituted no dereliction of principle, but rather a practical policy. If he and his Aryas were to be a leaven within the body of Hinduism, then they had to avoid any actions that might force that body to expel them. Expulsion from the body would mean that, like the Brahmos, they would become ineffective outsiders.

Thus Dayananda's concept of *dharma* developed parallel with his concept of man. As he elevated man gradually to a position of complete freedom and responsibility within his 'natural elements', society and cosmos, so he elevated *dharma*. From its

early beginnings as lip-service to traditional taboos and regulations, it gradually grew into a plan for pure, responsible moral action. This action of necessity had to involve all men, even the *sannyāsīs*, in society and the world. Man's ultimate goal, his ascent to the highest state of *moksha*, was to be conditional on such involvement. This high moral code was perhaps Dayananda's greatest legacy to his followers. The best of the Aryas have been people inspired by that ideal of a man dedicated to action, socially-committed and humanistic, who tries to guide his life by simple and clear moral principles.

### C. THE REFORMER: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ĀRYĀVARTA

The picture that is sometimes presented of Dayananda receiving his mission to reform the whole of India from his *guru* Virjananda, is nothing but a fantasy. Every idea that became part of the ethos of the Dayananda of the final years took long to mature and develop, and so did his ideal of the reconstruction of Āryāvarta. For the first thirty-five years of his life Dayananda was not concerned with the physical, moral, or religious state of his fellow-men, but only with his personal search for *moksha*. No doubt the influence of his *guru* and of the city of Mathura redirected his concern to the world around him. But when he left his *guru* and started to preach, the content of his instruction was still very tentative, and his teaching work took second place to study. He had no general plan, but he instructed wherever his studies brought him, simply responding to the needs of the moment; in fact very much in the manner of the wandering *sannyāsī*.

His visit to Hardwar in 1867 and his campaign at the Kumbh Melā was his first planned and concerted effort to make an impact on the Hindu world. But this attempt was a miscalculation and ended in failure and disappointment. Then, after desolately wandering along the banks of the Ganga, the Swami slowly drifted into a new type of reform work. This was a very localized effort along a stretch of the Ganga only one hundred miles long, in an essentially rural setting. Dayananda was still thinking in local and immediate terms, and his movements were not clearly planned. His preaching was directed to individuals, his moderate success was with individuals, and in a caste-dominated society such attempts at individual reform were always precarious. But as



the Swami moved about, he engaged more and more often in public disputations with pandits. As in most cases he easily vanquished them, his fame spread, more important pandits challenged him, and some antagonists were brought in from the cities to try to defeat the iconoclast who was making too strong an impression. This process of challenge and response finally brought the Swami to Banaras, the citadel of orthodoxy.

The Banaras *shāstrārth* was most important, in that it put the Swami on a more than local stage; the challenge of the Banaras pandits had in itself made him into a figure of all-Hindu importance. Moreover, here in Banaras Dayananda met reformers from Bombay and Calcutta. It was here that he spoke for the first time of his dream of the regeneration of Āryāvarta through a return to the Vedic religion. However, at that stage this was only a vague ideal, not a concrete programme. In fact, although his performance in the disputation had strengthened the Swami's self-confidence, the collapse of his influence in Banaras after the pandits declared him defeated and unorthodox made him realize that his work so far had had little effect. That is why he again spent more time in study and reflection. At the Allahabad Kumbh Melā he met Debendranath Tagore who invited him to Calcutta.

The Calcutta visit was a cardinal turning point in the Swami's career. The Bengalis steered Dayananda's mind out of the narrow ambit it had been moving in. They opened up new perspectives, and helped the Swami to think in broader social and national terms: to see education as the most important factor in the uplift of the people; to consider the wide social responsibilities of the state; to be aware of the different aspects of the plight of Hindu womanhood; and to think of Hinduism in a comparative framework. Dayananda saw at close quarters a superbly-organized effort at social and religious reform, and his eyes were opened to a new range of approaches. In Calcutta he discovered the great power of lectures and publications, the strength of organization, and the receptivity of the urban middle classes to the call for reform.

The transformation was remarkable; the roving *sannyāsī* of the rural Doab overnight became the fiery lecturer of the North Indian cities, a public figure of imposing stature. He also started his work as a publicist of the pen by bringing out in his first



*Satyārth Prakāsh* a full statement of his reform programme. His impact and appeal were great, yet all his attempts at organization still failed; his schools proved ineffective, and the Banaras Sabhā, which he established, died a quick death.

It was Bombay that offered the Swami the chance effectively to add a new dimension to his reform efforts in the form of a solid organizational base. A small but compact group of people, primarily from the Gujarati merchant castes, had been looking towards the *Vedas* for the reformation of their religion. They found in Dayananda an inspiration and a leader, and he found in them the first members of his own Samaj. Nevertheless, the Swami was cautious, as he was too conscious of the dangers of sectarianism he had witnessed among the Brahmos. He would have preferred a broader base for his Arya Samaj, and tried unsuccessfully to persuade existing Prarthana Samaj branches to join. So he had to be satisfied with a small group of people who were neither socially nor intellectually influential. He also made it clear to the Bombay Aryas that their organization was their own responsibility, and that they had no exclusive rights over him.

If Bombay gave the Arya Samaj a start, the Panjab proved a much greater success. One of the reasons for this success was that the Hindu élite of the Panjab had broader-based needs than those of the Bombay Aryas. Whereas the latter's needs were primarily religious, that of the former were also social, cultural, and even political. Moreover, the Panjab castes who were drawn towards the Swami included the intellectual and social leaders in their areas. Compared to the Bombay Aryas they were a much more influential group. Whereas the Bombay Aryas constituted only a small selection of people from the Gujarati trading castes, the Panjab Arya Samaj captured a significant number of the leading elements in the influential Khatri community.

As the success achieved in the Panjab spread into Western U.P.; and many branches of the Samaj sprang up in this area, Dayananda saw his dream of creating a movement with a broader base become reality. The Panjabis had convinced him that it was necessary to lessen the doctrinal content of the Samaj rules and this resulted in the enrolment of a more varied type of people, including even Sikhs. Whereas previously the target of the Swami's caustic criticism had been mostly sectarian Hinduism, in the Panjab

it found a further butt — Christianity. The Swami's anti-Christian attitude was another element that increased his appeal among a wider section of Hindus. As the Samaj spread over North-West India and as his Vedic commentary went to thousands of subscribers from Calcutta to Lahore and Bombay, it was obvious that the Swami was making a serious impact on North Indian Hinduism.

But as the Samaj grew, orthodox opposition intensified, precisely because it noticed the widening impact of the Samaj, and hoped to isolate the Samaj by branding its Swami unorthodox. Within the Samaj there was among some Aryas a tendency towards consolidation, closing the ranks, accentuation of their distinctiveness, and a desire to involve the Swami more closely with the Samaj. To Dayananda these looked like steps in the direction of narrow sectarianism. It was not his dream to be the founder and *guru* of a reformed sect, but to work for the regeneration of the whole of Āryāvarta. His own efforts and those of his Samaj were not only for the sake of the Aryas, but for the sake of the larger body of Hinduism. The larger community was still in the grip of orthodoxy, and the Samaj could reform it only if its members took care to remain within its fold.

So the Swami once more redirected his inexhaustible energies, this time with the aim of involving himself and his Samaj as much as possible with Hindus generally. The union with the Theosophists, the agitation to support Indramani, the movements for cow-protection and for Hindī, and finally the Swami's campaign in the princely states of Rajasthan were all directed towards the same end: on the one hand they took the Swami away from Samaj affairs, and on the other hand they pushed the Aryas out of their isolation into collaboration with the orthodox and sectarians. Dayananda replaced the cry for controversy by the cry for consensus. He carefully avoided breaking taboos so as not to antagonize the orthodox, and advised his Aryas to act likewise. He was also becoming more interested in the low castes and the untouchables, for Hindus generally started to realize that it was amongst that section of Hindu society that Christians and Muslims were becoming increasingly successful. In the last year of his life the Swami also cast his eyes for the first time across the Vindhya range to South India, which had hitherto been completely outside his concern.



As the Swami thus redirected his energies towards the larger community of Hinduism, his thought gained a new dimension. Whereas so far his preoccupations had been primarily religious and social, with an almost complete neglect of the political side of the situation, now a new concern with political matters came more and more often to the fore. His writings and speeches now frequently contained references to political nationalism, to political independence, and to the evils of the British Raj. This new spirit was often fully expressed in the second *Satyārth Prakāsh*, in its bitter anti-Christian and anti-British pronouncements. It was also very much part of the three agitations in which the Swami involved the Arya Samaj: the agitations for Indramani, cow-protection, and Hindī. In each of these movements resentment against the British was combined with a strong anti-Muslim bias.

Thus towards the end of his life the Swami's eyes became more firmly focussed beyond the Arya Samaj upon the total religious, social, and also political regeneration of India as a whole. That final vision evolved over many years. After localized attempts, false starts, and ten years of reflection, it was only in 1870 that he first spoke of the general ideal of a reconstruction of the Vedic Golden Age. But it took twelve more years to work out in detail what exactly that ideal consisted of in terms of the individual, the family, society, and the state. During these years the Swami kept looking for new and more effective means by which that ideal could be gradually realized.

Dayananda's ideal was a peculiar combination of radicalism and gradualism. If one looks at his proposals of reform in the spheres of ritual, education, social organization, and political structure, and at the drastic abolition of existing customs and structures they imply, one can scarcely think of a more radical programme. However, strictly speaking, these proposals did not constitute a programme, but an ideal. They presented the ideal conditions which once existed in the Vedic Golden Age and would one day again prevail in India. The realization of that ideal could only be very gradual, as the Swami well knew; that is why he demanded even from the Aryas very little practical and immediate reform action. How then did he envisage his function and that of the Samaj in this process of reform? The Swami was a strong believer in the power of truth, of ideas. He was convinced that once people accepted the truth of the ideal, they would conform



their life to it. Whereas during his period in the Doab he sought to reform the lives of individuals, after his visit to Calcutta he was more concerned with the wider propagation of his ideas. His Samaj, his publications, his Vedic commentary, his involvement with all-Hindu agitations, and his work among the princes were different phases of that ever-widening effort to disseminate the ideal. Dayananda was convinced that once there was a widespread belief in the ideal, the actual implementation of reform would naturally follow.

#### D. THE MAN

Dayananda's personality was not one easily captured in a simple formula, for it had many different complementary facets. Of these the most immediately obvious is that from his youth to his full maturity he was a self-directed, self-sufficient, rugged individualist. Neither parents nor teachers could map his road for him; neither religious nor political authority could coerce him. He always had to discover his own way and to decide for himself what direction he would take. Not even his own Samaj was able to imprison him in the role of leader or *guru*. This bold individualism was the fountainhead of the astounding originality of many facets of his thought and endeavour. It was also the source of a self-assurance that sometimes grew into an arrogance that alienated people and made him many bitter enemies, and of an inner rigidity that made him a poor judge of people.

The strong individualism was connected with an exceedingly active temperament. Dayananda was eminently a man of action. To become a *sannyāsī* never meant to him an escape into a sanctuary of contemplative isolation. Although he spent the first fifteen years of his adult life in the search of the personal goal of *moksha*, this search was never the patient awaiting of a dawn, but an active, frantic pursuit that sometimes drove him to the utter limits of physical and psychic endurance. In his long practice of the techniques of Yoga he trained himself to become a man of enormous bodily and mental resources, who was able to sustain a pace of work that astonished even the most vigorous. Activity was to him the first commandment. This side of his temperament was expressed to the fullest in his moral teaching that the very essence of man, his greatest nobility, is to be free,

ever active, and deeply involved. This explains the extreme severity of his judgement on all forms of living he considered parasitic, such as those of the lazy *sannyāsīs* who live off the charity of the poor, of priests who sell wares worth nothing, or of kings who enjoy the luxuries of court life. In the Swami's letters one often finds harsh words for Aryas and helpers when he suspected them of taking things too easily.

Dayananda's approach to life and its problems was characterized by two tendencies which at first may seem contradictory: a high regard for principle and a common-sense pragmatism. Once the Swami had clearly perceived a moral or theological principle, nothing was allowed to stand in its way. Throughout his life very influential people and well-meaning friends on occasion tried to make him compromise on such a principle; they always met with a fearless and blunt refusal. Neither threats of loss of influence, of ostracism, of the demise of friendship, even of danger to his life, nor promises of wealth or of success in his reform work, could dislodge the Swami from his stand. His adherence to principle was of an inflexible and narrowly rationalistic type; he tended to judge things in terms of black and white, and had little appreciation of all the grey areas, the shades of meaning, the ambiguities and uncertainties that are inherent in so many spheres of human thought and of ethics. This passion of Dayananda's for high principle and its concomitant rationalism often made him dogmatic, and prevented him from genuinely appreciating the point of view of others. His narrow literalism blinded him to the deeper truths that may be hidden in myth, symbol, and allegory.

Yet, this strict adherence to principle went hand-in-hand with a sound, common-sense pragmatism. This allowed him to look at a situation, judge its elements in the light of a clear scale of values, and make an appropriate decision. As a youth he decided to take *sannyāsa* because this would free him for study, which he considered his most important task; the same motive made him surrender his *danda*. When he felt he needed to study Sanskrit he did not hesitate to sit as a mature man among the youngsters at the feet of Virjananda, because he was the best teacher available. The naked *sannyāsī* of the Doab started without any scruples to acquire books, clothes, servants, and eventually his own press, because all this was necessary for his work. When his schools



did not achieve their aims he simply abolished them. When the Panjabis argued that the Bombay rules of the Samaj contained too much doctrinal matter, he agreed to minimize it so as to ensure wider appeal. Although he considered all food and pollution taboos utterly valueless, he obeyed them because, if by breaking them he became branded as an outcaste, he would lose his influence on the body of Hinduism. The Swami's pragmatism was best expressed in his judgement of widow-remarriage. He was convinced that *niyoga* was the only proper procedure for the twice-born, but he admitted that if *niyoga* were not to be accepted, then widow-remarriage was infinitely better than the contemporary oppression of widows. However, his pragmatism was not unprincipled or cynical; it was cool, deliberate choice according to his own scale of values. In the eyes of those who did not agree with that scale, the Swami's pragmatism appeared ruthless opportunism.

Dayananda, with all his inner resources and his self-control, was yet basically an extrovert, a doer, whose mind was fixed on the present and on the future. This made him into a dominating presence, an eloquent orator, a man of magnetic charisma. He never dwelt upon his past. When he became convinced, after due deliberation, that some idea or approach he had long cherished was not right, he simply discarded it. He did not laboriously and painfully dwell upon this change, he did not even bother to repudiate his former belief. If someone drew his attention to a discrepancy, he simply declared that after due consideration he had changed his mind and that what he previously held was due to ignorance on his part. He told his Aryas that he expected the same attitude from them. He never wallowed in the ashes of the past; they had to be thrown away and forgotten. His opponents have accused Dayananda of inconsistency, fickleness, and even duplicity, by pointing out the discrepancies between the two editions of his *Satyārth Prakāsh*. The Aryas have defended their Swami by explaining away the differences or by trying to prove that mischievous interpolators had been at work. Dayananda's answer would have been simpler: 'what I wrote eight years ago is irrelevant now, because I have changed my mind; tell me what is wrong with the position I hold today'.

How was it that the ideas of such an individualist, a man of such high principles, changed so often and so thoroughly? Every



important idea held by the Swami of the eighties had taken many years to evolve and had undergone many transformations. The reason is that Dayananda was open to new ideas and perspectives, always keen to widen his learning and his horizons. The present study has identified many of the sources of profound influence on the Swami, such as Virjananda and the ambience of Mathura, the community of Sādhs, the Bengali intelligentsia, the aspirations of the Khatri and the atmosphere of the Panjab, Christian ideas, the *Brahmo Dharma*, the Sāmkhya system, and the growing Arya Samaj. But the receptivity of the Swami to outside influence was never passive. Every new idea had to be tested in his own fire of reason and of action, and only what withstood that heat was kept, and hammered into a new shape. One may trace the stages in the gradual growth of Dayananda's conceptions of God, of man, of the *Vedas*, of the Vedic Golden Age, of the function of the Arya Samaj, of the duties of the state and the nature of nationalism, and detect the successive influences that helped shape them, but the finished product was always unique, a new creation. The Swami's mind was open to new ideas, but anything that entered it was transformed in an original manner. Those of his followers who have raised him to the exalted stature of a *guru* have minimized and even denied that dominant aspect of his personality, his dynamism, his genius for transformation, his receptivity to new ideas and vistas.

There is another aspect of the Swami's view of life that is too often overlooked because it is overshadowed by other facets, that is his humanism. We refer here to the central meaning of that term, a concern for humanity-in-this-world, and not to the refined and aesthetic connotations it evokes. Dayananda was not a man of refinement, he was basic, direct, and even blunt; he was no aesthete, and in fact there is no indication that he had time or need for the appreciation of art and beauty in any form. He was a humanist because his deep concern for man was not limited to man's ultimate religious fulfilment. For Dayananda that fulfilment comprised also a full and rich life here on earth. This is evident in his many descriptions of an ideal family life: prosperity, peace, contentment, close relations between family members are emphasized again and again. His description of the ideal society and state always included references to a prosperous economy, abolition of poverty, just distribution of wealth and

education, and satisfying occupations for all men according to their abilities. Dayananda did not see any positive value in starvation, poverty, suffering, or asceticism in themselves. This humanism of the *sannyāsī* is evident even in his concept of *moksha*: to him it is a state that comprises, besides the contemplation of God, also deep interpersonal relations between the *jīvas* and their continuing interaction with cosmic life.

Such was Swami Dayananda: an individualist consumed by a passion for action, principled yet pragmatic; a man with great inner depth yet totally involved in the present and always working for a better future; a mind receptive to the rapidly changing world around him but never passively submitting to its pressures; a man consumed by the dream of a better life for all, a happiness not only religious, but also social and economic. In the light of those basic characteristics one comes to understand better the Swami's limitations and excesses, his severity, his dogmatism, his blind spots. In the final instance they are but the contrasting shadows that accentuate the basic greatness of a man who made himself into one of the giant figures of nineteenth-century India.