

Summary

In her book *A World of Vedic Truths. The Life and Teaching of Swami Dayananda* O.V.Mezentseva looks at world conception and activities of Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), a prominent reformer of Hinduism and the founder of the "Arya Samaj" society.

An analysis of his heritage based on the sources written in Sanskrit and Hindi shows that central to his reformist aspirations was the conviction that it was essential to "purify" Hinduism of the later accreditations and to recover the purity of the ancient religious doctrine. By this Dayananda explained his struggle against sectarian disunity, idolatry, polytheism, his negative attitude to the role of priests posing as all but exclusive mediators between man and God, and his renunciation of pilgrimage and lavish rituals. He extensively criticized the two of the more prominent and influential trends of the Vedanta, namely Advaita and Vishisht-Advaita, which furnished the bedrock foundation of Hinduism in his time. His criticism did not signify a repudiation of the traditional religious-philosophical heritage; on the contrary, guided by the goal of cementing society and the need to provide the rallying spiritual guideposts, the reformer proclaimed six "correctly understood" darshanas, mutually complementary and not contradictory. This enabled him to blend together some of the elements of Vedanta, Sankhya and Vaisheshika into a distinct teaching which he named "Traitavada" (treating of that is known as the triplicity or triad, namely of Brahman, Jiva and Prakriti or God, the soul and the matter). He suggested largely new solutions to world-outlook problems in attempting to furnish answers to such eternal questions as: What is the real-life

world? How does man cognize the world and how does he act?

The inquiry into Dayananda's teaching is conducted against the background of his reformist activities in the time of a nascent conflict between medieval consciousness and India's new social realities in the 19th century. The examination of Dayananda's ontological position leads the author to the conclusion that in postulating the existence of the three independent and coexisting entities or essences (Brahman, Jiva and Prakriti), he above all sought to find a theoretical explanation for his repudiation of Advaita whereby Brahman is the sole reality, the material and efficient cause of the world. Traitavada absorbed the rationalistic elements of realistic systems (Sankhya and Vaisheshika), and the world is regarded by it as existing objectively. By repudiating the supertheism of Advaita and embracing the theism of Vaisheshika, the reformer thus also "invalidated" the basing of Mayavada, the Advaita teaching about the three levels of being, and did away with the opposition of the spiritual world to the temporal world of multiplicity of things and phenomena.

Swami Dayananda was dissatisfied with the meaning emerging from the interpretation of the man-God relationship made by both trends of the Vedanta. In his Traitavada, this relationship is different: the soul and God are eternal, distinct and independent essences or entities possessing a number of common characteristics (purity, eternity), but they are not identical (as in Advaita), the soul is not part of God (as in Vishishta-Advaita). An important result of this interpretation of the man-God relationship in Traitavada is the evolvment of world-outlook and theoretical foundations for understanding the place of man in the world. It was through new solutions to general ontological questions that the reformer's guidelines constituting his approach to the problems of man's being, markedly different from the classical Vedanta approach, were eventually realized.

Solutions to problems of ethical and social order, in many respects new, follow from his view of the world.

According to Traitavada man is endowed with free will, he is absolutely free in his actions and deeds but he bears responsibility for whatever he has done. The reformer is convinced that God created the world exclusively for man. In answering the questions as to whether the destiny of an individual endowed with free will is determined by his own deeds and whether the assumption of God, the supreme ruler of the world, is necessary in principle, Dayananda furnishes solutions deriving from a merger of Mimamsa, Sankhya and Vaisheshika. From the first two darshanas he derives the tenet whereby one takes the consequences or rather fruits of his deeds, and this is an unalterable process which it is beyond the power of anything or anyone to violate or change; simultaneously, the reformer invokes a postulate, drawn from the Nyaya-Vaisheshika, whereby God, as the world's supreme ruler, "supervises" the law of retribution and reward. Traitavada had a set of possibilities different from those of Advaita and Vishishta-Advaita: Dayananda regarded man as an subject of cognition and action: the concept of activity of the individual has become central to this teaching. The essence of Dayananda's opposition to the two leading trends of the Vedanta is seen by the author in that he proposed a kind of turn away from the mystical self-realisation on the basis of one's inner experience (as in Advaita) or acquisition of salvation "by the grace of God" (as in Vishishta-Advaita), towards a world interpretation whereby it is only the individual's direct activity in the present time that brings him closer to Brahman.

It is important to note that by elevating man's intellectual aspirations, Dayananda sought to combine the demand for science (mainly implying Western scientific advances) with the values of Hindu tradition. Widely known are his theses such as "the Vedas are in perfect accord with

science", "the Vedas are the source of all knowledge". On the other hand, he called into question the infallibility, uniqueness and exclusiveness of Shruti; he put forward the reason and consciousness of man as a thinking and moral creature, as a principal criterion in the interpretation of particular sacred writings as "God's word". Moreover, the reformer proclaimed that it is precisely the material and technical "mastering" of the world and the placing of natural science in its service that would open the path towards salvation. In his Traitavada the sources for cognizing Brahman and those for cognizing the natural world are fused together. Realisation of man's potentialities and his drawing closer to God do not imply for him disregard for the social system under which he lives, reposing on the thesis of incompatibility of "true" knowledge with knowledge of empirical world (as in Advaita). Nor should man live a life of recluse and cultivate selflessness and a total absorption in God. He must transform and perfect contemporary society. Dayananda did not conceive of his teaching as a doctrine divorced from the real socio-practical needs of man, and he affirmed the ideal of an active individual aware of his responsibility for all processes unfolding in the world. The willpower, abilities and altitudes, and personal interests of every individual should be aimed at the perfection of social life, winning of independence, purification of Hinduism, democratization of the system, etc.

The author puts in doubt the view that Dayananda's teaching were the embryo of the ideology of "Hindu communalism". Dayananda subjected to criticism (from rationalistic positions) the four religious systems: Puranism (this was his term for traditional Hinduism), Jainism, Christianity and Islam seeking to demonstrate the discrepancy of their theory and practice with the norms of morality, the principles of logical reasoning and information and findings constituting scientific knowledge. He proceeded from the assumption that his teaching were God's word "correctly understood",

originally set forth in the Vedas but later subjected to significant distortions. Although criticisms of Islam occupied an insignificant place in his constructs the very intention of exposing "weak points" in religious systems in conditions of a multiconfessional country was fraught with certain complication. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to tie up the name of Dayananda with the idea of superiority of the Hindu on the basis of which the ideology of communalism was developed later. Speaking of the "Aryan community" in ancient times the reformer repeated, in reverse, the Christian thesis that "there exist neither a Hellene, nor an Israelite" implying that the "Aryan world" comprised all collectives of the ancient world irrespective of race. His attempt to rationally demonstrate the verity of a particular teaching served as a warning to subsequent generations of reformers.

Thus, in expounding his world-view Dayananda attempted to revise the picture of the world and of man's place in it that had found expression in the classical darshanas but was no longer consistent with the processes unfolding in India in the 19th century.