

## **Swadhyaya Movement in Gujarat**

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India is a country of having the quality of heterogeneity in many societal aspects viz. religion, culture, languages, regions, rituals, practices etc. However, there are some common factors that indicate uniformity in heterogeneity such as festivals, common features of religions, morality, values, belief and so on. Amongst these factors, religion becomes an imperative aspect to analyse changes occur in society. One of the important changes can be seen in the emergence of modern Hindu sects and spiritual organisations. Swadhyaya is one of the spiritual organisations that aims at self-transformation and focuses on the motto of brotherhood and humanity.

Swadhyaya *Parivar* was founded by Pandurang Shastri Athavale. Pandurang Shastri was known as *Dada* in Swadhyaya *Parivar*. He was born in Maharashtra in 1920. His grandfather Laxmanrao and father Vaijanath had great impact on his philosophical building. At very young age (22), he started to deliver religious discourse at *Srimad Bhagvat Gita Pathashala* which was founded by his father. In 1956, he participated in Second World Religious Conference in Japan, wherein the idea of creating society based on Upanishadic values came in his mind (Giri, 2008).

He returned to India to create such society. This idea took form of *Bhakti-pheri*. *Bhakti-pheri* literally means devotional tour. In 1958, around 19 followers begun *Bhakti-pheri* in the villages of Saurashtra. It was a beginning of Swadhyaya in Gujarat. *Bhakti-pheri* is a way of spreading Swadhyaya philosophy. The philosophical foundation of Swadhyaya is based on message of Bhagwat Geeta and Upanishadas. *Bhakti*, *Gyan*, and *Karma* – are three imperative axioms of Swadhyaya.

Swadhyaya, literally means study of self. Swadhyaya Kendra are vital for study of self and self-transformation. There are various Kendra such as *Bal Sanskar Kendra* (centre for children), *Mahila Kendra* (centre for women), *Yuvati Kendra* (centre for young men), *Yuvati Kendra* (centre for young women), Video Kendra, *Sampark Kendra* and so on. Activities of

Kendra relate with leaning of *sloka* (verses) and moral values from Vedic literature. Apart from Kendra, Socio-economic experiments of Swadhyaya are important.

Socio-economic experiments of Swadhyaya contains various *Prayogas* viz. *Matsyagandha*, *Yogeshwar Krishi*, *Shridarshanam*, *Vriksh Mandir*, *Amrutalayam*, *Ghar Mandir*, *Patanjali Chikitsalaya*, *Goras* and *Parivar* store. The socio-economic experiments have community base and it contributes to generate impersonal wealth.

*Matsyagandha* is a floating temple on the waters of ocean. Those who work on the boat are recognised as *Pujaris*. *Matsyagandha* does not mean mother of Ved Vaysa. It is a name of the boat for expedition of fisher community. The major significance of *Matsyagandha* is the use of skills and talents for the service of God. *Matsyagandha* is a boat on co-operative basis and recognises fishing as worship of God. The first *Matsyagandha* lunched on 21 December, 1980 (Athavale, 1992).

Swadhyaya has given new name to *machimar* (fishier community men) – *Sagarputra* i.e. son of ocean. Swadhyaya movement brought the significant change in the fisher community. Due to the influence of its philosophy, people have given up bad habits like alcohol drinking. *Matsyagandha* generates impersonal wealth and favours devotional labour. Those who work on *Matsyagandha* are working selflessly as doing God's work (Swadhyaya, 1994a).

*Yogeshwar Krishi* has also co-operative basis and it is a collective farming. *Yogeshwar Krishi* glorifies the importance of *Kriti-bhakti*. Without any help from government and fund, it aims at growth and development of the village. There are more than 3200 *Yogeshwar Krishi* occurs in India and at abroad (Swadhyaya, undated). *Shridarshanam* is a collective group farming by 20 or more than 20 villages.

*Yogeshwar Krishi* represent the philosophy that God does not only exist in the building of temple. God is everywhere and *Yogeshwara* is an owner of *Yogeshwara Krishi*. It has gone beyond Russia's state farming and china's co-operative farming. *Yogeshwar Krishi* is not a social work, but it is a devotional work. It does not relate with materiality, it relates with spirituality (Swadhyaya, 1994b). The backbone of this experiment is "fitting the unfit to survive with devotion" (Swadhyaya, 1994b: 14).

*Vriksh Mandir* is at two levels. At individual level with green devotion and in society, it relates with green revolution. *Vriksh Mandir* represents the amalgamation of green devotion and green revolution. *Vriksh Mandir* is a collective orchard and *Yogeshwar* is the owner. The first experiment of *Vriksh Mandir* lunched in Rajkot (*Yagnyvalka Vrish Mandir*) on 12 July, 1979. All *Vriksh Mandir* come under the administration of 'Vaijanath Bhav Darshan'-Mumbai (Swadhyaya, undated: 76). *Vriksh Mandir* is a green temple and it also gives importance to *shram-bhakti* i.e. labour work. Those who keep this orchard are known as *pujaries*. It deals with spirituality. This experiment is not experiment on tree but this experiment on human (Swadhyaya, 1994c).

*Amrutalayam* is a home of God. It is a place where all men and women can come together and do *prathana* (prayer). It is a place which tries to eradicate hierarchy between human. The very first *Amrutalayam* established in Mahuva (District Bhavnagar) on 28 April, 1980. *Loknath Amrutalayam* can be considered as socio-economic centre of the village (Swadhyaya, undated). All villagers can come together as children of God. The villagers give potion of their earring in *Amrutalayam* as God's potion. This potion is used to give those who are in need as *Prasad* of God. According to Swadhyaya philosophy, this is a way of healthy distribution. This donation process was existed in Vedic period which is suitable to abolish gap between rich and poor (Athavale, 1991).

Another *prayogas* (experiments) are *Goras* and *Parivar* store. *Goras* relates with milk selling. It is a socio-economic *prayoga* of Swadhyaya. *Parivar* store and *Phatkada* store are places where Swadhyayees learn to do business in a spiritual way. Two noticeable *prayogas* are occurred in tribal areas i.e. *Ghar Mandir* and *Patanjali Chikitsalaya*. *Ghar Mandir* is a prayer house cum temple like *Amrutalayam*. *Ghar Mandir* is a unique experiment in tribal area. This house temple is not stable. *Ghar Mandir* consists Swadhyaya trinity's photograph (Yogeshwara, Parvati with child Ganesha and Lord Shiva) and Pandurang Athavale (Dadaji). It moves from one house to another house. One house can host for one week (Giri, 2008: 204-205). *Patanjali Chikitsalaya* is a kind of hospital where Swadhyayees doctors give medicines and treatments in tribal areas. Doctors do also *bhavferi* during their visit and for them this is god's work.

In a nutshell, the genesis of Swadhyaya can be seen in the practice of *Bhakti-pheri*. Through *Bhakti-pheri* and *Bhav-pheri*, Swadhayees endeavour to spread message of Geeta and Upanishadas. Swadhyaya Kendras are imperative for self-transformation. Socio

economic experiments exhibit the notion of devotional labour i.e. *shram bhakti*. The way of functioning of various Kendra, and especially functioning of *prayogas*, differ Swadhyaya from other spiritual organisations.

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