



Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Dayanand, Vivekananda And Hinduism

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Abstract- We are free today from foreign domination and many other rigidities. The Indian society in the first half of the 19th century was caste ridden, decadent and rigid. It followed certain practices which are not in keeping with humanitarian feelings or values but were still being followed in the name of religion. A change was therefore needed in the society. When the British came to India they introduced the English language as well as certain modern ideas. These ideas were those of Liberty, social and economic equality, fraternity, democracy and justice which had a tremendous impact on Indian society. Fortunately for our country there were some enlightened Indian like Dayanand Sarasvati, swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and many others who were willing to fight and bring in reforms in society so that it could face the challenges of the west.

Gandhi emerged as a new Messiah in Indian politics in 1919 and completely dominated Indian politics down to 1947.

Nehru wrote in 1945, “Gandhiji’s influence is not limited to those who accept him as a national leader, it extends to those also who disagree with him and criticize him...To the vast majority of Indian’s people he is the symbol of India determined to be free, or militant nationalism, of a refusal to submit to arrogant might, of never agreeing to anything involving national dishonor. Though many people in India may disagree with him on a hundred matters. Though they may criticize him or even part company from him on some particular issue, at a time action and struggle when India’s freedom is at stake they flock to him and look up to him as their inevitable Leader”

Gandhi was a national figure. He combined in himself the role of a prophet, Hindu religious reformer, a social reformer and a nationalist fighting the struggle for Indian Independence for. For the humanity in general he had the message of non-violence; he wanted to purge Hindu religion of its dogmas and superstitions; he

worked for a new social order of social equality bereft of the evils of casteism and untouchability; as a nationalist he became a symbol of democracy, individual and national freedom.

The impact of 'Gandhi's personality on Hindu-Muslim relations and unity of the country has been variously assessed. Penderel moon blames Gandhi for a rapid Hinduising of the congress which proved injurious to the cause of Indian unity. He writes : "This hinduising of the national movement' which Gandhi's leadership promoted and symbolized, was injurious and ultimately fatal to Hindu-Muslim unity...At the more conscious level of political bargaining he can be blamed for repeated failure to come to terms with leaders of Muslim opinion. His congress colleagues must share the blame and, of course blame also attaches to the Muslim politicians and, to some extent, to the British who at a crucial time showed little interest in bringing the parties together. But the largest share of responsibility for the failure to reach an agreement that could have preserved Indian unity appears to fall on Gandhi and the congress- though it was they who most desired to preserve it."

Mohit Sen, an Indian communist, writes : "As in the case of Tilak, the criticism is made that the language of Gandhi, his prayer meetings, his insistence on non-violence and the rest helped to spread communalism or at least brought grist to the mill of the communalists. This appears to be unbalanced criticism. The main result of the work and preaching of Gandhi was the partial turning of the awakened Hindu masses to secularism and nationalism and from communalism and casteism. He did not succeed completely by any means, as the partition tragedy only too grimly showed. Nevertheless, more than any other single individual on a massive scale he was able to place a picture of a secular India and of communal unity. The fact that India chose to remain a secular republic is in a large measure due to him. The Hindu communalist felt at an enormous disadvantage in competing him since it was impossible to contest the "Indianness" or the "Hinduness" of the man or to dispute that what he was telling the people sprang from the very depths of the traditions of India.

The Arya samaj movement was an outcome of reaction to western influences. It was revivalist in form though not in content. The founder Swami Dayanand, rejected western ideas and sought to revive the ancient religion of the Aryans.

Dayanand's ideal was to unite India religiously, socially and nationally- Aryan religion to be the common religion of all, a classless and classless society, and an India free from foreign rule. He looked on the Vedas as India's 'Rock of Ages', the true original seed of Hinduism. His motto was 'Go back to Vedas'. He gave his own interpretation of the Vedas. He disregarded the authority of the later Hindu scriptures like the puranas and describe them as the work of lesser men and responsible for the evil practices of idol worship and other superstitious beliefs in the Hindu religion.

Dayanand launched a frontal attack on the numerous abuses like idolatry, polytheism, belief in magic, charms, etc. He rejected the popular Hindu philosophy which held that the physical world is an illusion, that man's soul is merely a part of God, temporarily separated from God by its embodiment in the illusory mask of the body and that man's object, therefore, was to escape the world where evil existed and seek union with God. Against this belief, Dayanand held that God, soul and matter were distinct and eternal entities and every individual had to work out his own salvation in the light of the eternal principles governing human conduct. Dayanand Accepted the doctrine of karma, but rejected the theory of destiny.

Dayanand challenged the dominant position of the Brahmin priestly class in the spiritual and social life of the Hindus. He ridiculed the claim of the priests that they could act as intermediaries between man and God. He strongly condemned the caste system based on Birth. The swami was also a strong advocate of equal status between man and woman. In a sarcastic language he described the Hindu race as "the children of children".

The Arya Samaj movement gave "proud" self-confidence and self-reliance to the Hindus and undermined the belief in the superiority of the white race and Western culture. As a disciplined Hindu organisation, it has succeeded in protecting Hindu society from the onslaught of Islam and Christianity. Rather, the samaj started the Shudi movement to convert non-Hindus to Hinduism. Further, it infused a spirit of intense patriotism.

The didactic rationalism of the Brahma samaj appealed more to the intellectual elite in Bengal, with the average Bengali found more emotional satisfaction in the cult of bhakti and yoga. The teachings of Ramakrishna mission are based on ancient and traditional concepts amidst increasing westernization and modernization. The Ramakrishna mission was conceived and founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897.

Vivekanand emerged as the preacher of neo-Hinduism. He attended the parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 and made a great impression by his learned interpretations. The keynote of his opening address was the need for a healthy balance between spiritualism and materialism. He envisaged a new culture for the whole world where the materialism of the west and the spiritualism of the East would be blended into a new harmony to produce happiness for mankind.

The Swami decried untouchability and the caste system. He strongly condemned the touch-me-not attitude of Hindus in religious matters. He regretted that Hinduism had been confined to the kitchen. He frowned at religion's tacit approval to the oppression of the poor by the rich. He believed that it was an insult to God and humanity to teach religion to a starving man. Once he said, "Him I call a Mahatma whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a Duratma. So long as millions live in

hunger and ignorance I hold every man a traitor who while educated at their expense, pays not the least to man". Thus, Vivekanand emphasized the fundamental postulate of his Master that the best worship of God is through service of humanity. In this way he gave a new social purpose to Hinduism.

Ever since its inception the Ramakrishna Mission has been in the forefront of social reform in the country. It runs a number of charitable dispensaries and hospitals, offers help to the afflicted in times of natural calamities like famines, floods, epidemics.

Vivekanand never gave any political message. All the same, through his speeches and writings he infused into the new generation a sense of pride in India's past, a new faith in India's culture and a rare sense of self-confidence in India's future. He was a patriot and worked for the uplift of the people. "So far as Bengal is concerned" writes Subhash Bose "Vivekanand may be regarded as the spiritual father of the modern nationalist movement".

References

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