
UNIT 17 SWAMI DAYANAND SARASWATI, SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND V.D. SAVARKAR

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17.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with the interface between politics and Hindu religion and theology through a presentation of ideas of three leading Hindu figures who contributed to the development of a distinctly Hindu conception of nationalism and politics. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the development of Hindu thought from mid-nineteenth century onwards
- Explain the attempt at regeneration of Hindu society through an elaboration of the idea of Hindu nationalism
- Comprehend the different strands in the above.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The political ideas of the three important figures that you will be studying in this unit represent, in religious terms, three different approaches and ideas. Dayanand Saraswati was a passionate believer in the final authority of the Vedas. His appeal for the revival of vedic Hinduism had little patience with polytheism and the countless meaningless rituals associated with it. Swami Vivekananda, on the other hand, despite an equally fervent desire to reform Hindu society and protect it from 'evil materialistic' influences of the west, drew his inspiration mainly from Vedantic philosophy. He therefore, stood for polytheism and idol worship. V.D. Savarkar on the other hand was more outspokenly political. He was himself an atheist of Hindu society. His emphasis on 'Hindutva' was mainly in order to enthuse the nationalist spirit with a purpose and direction. His nationalism was therefore also much more stridently aggressive.

However, despite these obvious differences these strands represent an underlying unity—the effort to elaborate the concept of nationalism on the basis of religiosity. It was this interface of religion and politics that a whole gamut of Indian nationalists embodied: Sri Aurobindo, the various "terrorist" i.e. revolutionary nationalist groups down to the Congress leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak. In fact, even the Gandhian leadership of the Congress, including Mahatma Gandhi represented this interface. Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya and his constant use of Hindu religious symbols

17.2 SWAMI DAYANAND SARASWATI

17.2.1 Biographical Sketch

Born at Morvi in Kathiawar (Gujarat) in Samavedi Brahmin Caste. At 21, he ran away from home to escape getting married. From 1845-1860 he wandered to different places in search of knowledge. In 1860, under Swami Virajananda Saraswati at Mathura, he began to study Panini and Patanjali and started preaching in 1864. On November 17, 1869, he engaged in a mighty **Shastrartha** (theological debate) with leaders of Hindu Orthodoxy at Kashi. On April 10, 1875, the Arya Samaj was established in Bombay, and in 1877 its constitution was finalized at Lahore.

17.2.2 Political Ideas of Dayanand

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was one of those influential thinkers who drew upon traditions for the formulation of his social ideas. His main contention was that it was necessary for Indians to go back to the ideas of the Vedas. When Dayanand was formulating his ideas and thoughts, Hinduism in practice had already degenerated. It was also a time when British rule in India was consolidating itself. His basic effort was therefore directed to attaining the three objectives of Vedic revivalism, rationalism and social reform of considerable contemporary import. He was heavily critical of the West and Islam. He was equally severe on those who advocated the path of modernisation through western ideas and attitudes.

The problem India faced and their solutions, according to Dayanand, lay at the levels of philosophy, politics and society. He thought that it was necessary to inculcate a spirit of self-reliance and self-confidence in the minds of the people.

Let us first discuss the core of his thought. Central to his thought was his attitude towards the Vedas, which he considered to be the repository of all human knowledge and wisdom. He highlighted the following aspects of the Vedas:

- 1) A man could communicate with God directly by rendering obedience to the divine law. He was free to obey other laws so long as they were in line with the divine laws. Dayanand felt that man can attain his pure self after examining and reviewing his position on this matter. Only after that will he be able to realize the discrepancy, thereby dissociating himself from such temporal laws which are not worthy of obedience and organise support against those laws.
- 2) The freedom enjoyed by a man was equal to that enjoyed by his fellowmen.
- 3) The Varnashram system provided for the full enjoyment of freedom for all, irrespective of their functional location within the social structure.

According to Dayanand, India could attain its lost glory only when the existing social weaknesses were overcome. Full of remorse, he lamented that despite the rich heritage of Indian culture, the Hindus were aping and imitating the civilisation of the west which in turn was degenerating them. He justified it by saying that India during the Vedic times had reached a level of civilization which the west was able to attain only centuries later.

He suggested that those who had come under the influence of Islam and Christianity and had become converts, must be taken back into the Hindu fold. His prescription was that it could be done through a process of 'Shuddhi' (purification), as Dayanand felt that their unification was essential as it would inspire them to accept the Vedas and hence provide a strong and self-reliant **bastion for the country**. To cement the cultural homogeneity he encouraged Hindi. Only when this unification was achieved and cemented by the common bond of Hindi, would India be in a position to throw off the yoke of foreign rule.

One of the biggest obstacles to national progress, however, came from within the Hindu society itself. A section of the upper caste Hindus manipulated the Varna

system followed by the Hindus. As a result merit as a qualification was replaced by that of birth which in turn led to inequality and subordination of a lower occupational group (caste) to its next higher one. The Brahmins became the unchallenged and unquestioned masters of the society and the Shudras were reduced to a pitiful state. The Hindus became enmeshed in elaborate rites, ceremonies, superstitions, dogmas along with idolatry, casteism, child marriage and polytheism.

Dayanand prescribed a return to the basic principles of the Varna system where birth would no longer be the sole criterion of caste status. Rather, 'Guna' (character), Karma (action) and Swabhava (nature) would be the basis of caste. He thought that caste, thus reformed could still act as a way of social reorganization. He thus somewhat 'Secularized' the idea of caste. It naturally went a long way in challenging the domination of the hereditary upper castes, and therefore in elevating the status of the oppressed and untouchables. He denounced untouchability as inhuman and as being against vedic religion. Any Shudra, in his scheme of things could become a dwija (twice-born) provided he practised cleanliness, character training and improvement in environment.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Briefly discuss Dayanand Saraswati's political ideas.

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17.2.3 Women, Education and Democracy

On the question of women, Dayanand was opposed to the evil practices of child marriage and enforced widowhood, which according to him did not have the sanction of Vedas. The pitiable condition of child-widows in Hindu society, which prohibited remarriage evoked his deepest concern. He therefore, suggested 'nigoga' (a non-permanent co-habitation of widows and widowers) and later, even widow re-marriage.

For the 'prosperity of Aryavarta' (India), Dayanand's world view had a crucial place for education. An education based on moral and religious foundations and meant for all the four classes of men and women, was what Dayanand wanted. The burden of this education was, according to him, to be shouldered by the king/state. He stood for compulsory education. India's awakening he thought, hinged on this factor. He was in favour of an educational system which would emphasize on grammar, philosophy, Vedas, sciences, medicine, music and art.

The political philosophy of Dayanand Saraswati has two central ideas—somewhat contradictory to each other.

The first is the idea of an 'Enlightened Monarchy' — a concept that he borrowed from Manusmriti—that is, a monarchy thoroughly rooted in obedience to Dharma. The second, somewhat contradictory notion is that of elective representation i.e. democracy, though, there really is no contradiction since, in the Vedas, there are references to assembly and the election of the king. Stressing the principle of election, he interprets the king as a president of the assembly. Moreover, politics, for him, was inseparable from morality and he therefore argued strongly for the guidance of political leaders by spiritual leaders.

Dayanand extended his democratic elective principle into the functioning and organizational structure of the Arya Samaj. He further visualized a polity which would be the embodiment of decentralization—a vast commonwealth with the village as the unit.

The following are some of the principles out of the ten important principles of the Arya Samaj (founded in 1875), which moulded a generation of freedom fighters, especially in northern India:

- 1) The source of pure knowledge is God.
- 2) The link between Vedas as guardians of true knowledge and an Arya Samajist is inseparable. He must assimilate its contents and make it popular among the people.
- 3) Ethical justifications of actions are a must.
- 4) The Arya Samaj is devoted to the idea of the emancipation of the world in all its aspects.
- 5) Rays of knowledge must dispel the darkness of ignorance.
- 6) One must leave enough for others. Man's well-being can only be identified with the collective development of his fellowmen.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly mention some of the principles on which the Arya Samaj was founded.

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17.3 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

17.3.1 Philosophy and Concept of Freedom

Swami Vivekananda was one of the most influential religious thinkers of 19th century India. His writings basically dealt with the freedom of man, its nature, norms, scope, and the idea of equating freedom with equality.

According to Vivekananda the universe was an illusory expression of the **Brahma**, the creator. **Maya** or illusion contained virtues such as knowledge, creativity, and instinctive desires which in fact was the visible image of the Creator. 'Brahma' had immense power to hold the universe together and its influence was felt in each and every object of its creation. The difference between 'Brahma' and his creations was the finitude of virtues in its material forms. The reference here is to mankind at large. What separated man from his creator was the kind of virtues ingrained in him. Each person had a different combination of unequal development of virtues. In contrast, this relationship was so complete and perfect in 'Brahma' that no difference could be discerned between the triple virtues of knowledge, creativity and instinctive desires and those which lay beyond virtues. Every person with his dominant virtue therefore formed a part of the larger whole; that is, the all-encompassing, all comprehensive totality, in the form of 'Brahma'. Hence, the goal of an individual could only find its true expression in the entire humanity (the Brahman mould). Vivekananda called the attaining of the 'Brahma-ness' by man, the state of 'moksha'.

Vivekananda goes on to add that man was born free but life constrained his natural freedom making him an atomised, isolated 'individual' who was solely interested in the unrestrained pursuit of his desires and aims which would sooner or later bring him into conflict with the equivalent freedom of another, thus cancelling each other out. While the virtues of individuality were essential for the development of his creative potentialities, so also was it necessary to bring out his social nature, his spiritual self. Vivekananda felt that it was possible for both individuality and

sociality to go together so that when man's individuality was restrained by his built-in sociality it would provoke resistance from the others of his kind.

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Since freedom was natural to human beings, limits to freedom would also have to be natural in order to retain its spontaneity. Hence such constraints on freedom will have to come from religion, since it alone could develop in human beings the relationship between individuality and sociality and raise it to a sufficiently higher place of spiritual consciousness. Vivekananda felt that certain circumstances compelled man to act in a way which inhibited the freedom of others as well as went against his own will. This could not amount to a realisation of true freedom. Thus, the purpose of limiting man's freedom should be refinement and not suppression. Religion defied any precise formulation and at times gave prominence to 'raj' relegating 'satwa' to the background for a time.

The pursuance of one's goals through freedom as well as acknowledging similar freedom for the other goes on to prove that man is essentially social, and therefore, would very much prefer living in a community. Vivekananda elucidates his thoughts with some examples. He stresses the evolution of natural communities in India as an outcome of the 'varna' system in which the 'Brahmins' and the 'Kshatriyas' were categorised under the 'raj' (creativity) and the 'Vaishyas' and the 'Shudras' under the 'Tam' category (instinctive desires). Such a categorisation finds similar reference in ancient Greece where Plato talked of three virtues: Reason, Courage, Appetite.

Vivekananda also adds that while social life in India called for emphasis on the role of specification of man as such within the society, comprehensiveness or totality was stressed by its western counterparts. Therefore with the decline of the pre-political age in India, the importance of 'man' steadily decreased while he held the centre stage in western society for long. This naturally sensitised the western society towards liberal principles such as freedom, equality, liberty etc.

Freedom, in a materially conditioned world no longer remained freedom but became a right. Freedom in his view belonged to the natural man i.e. pre-political man. Once the political order was created it became clear that freedom degenerated into rights. Since men fought for rights, not for true freedom which was a spontaneous and universal process, for instance:

PURE FORM

- 1) Varnashrama (free mobility on merit)
- 2) True Freedom
- 3) Social Man

CORRUPT FORM

Transformed into hereditary, hierarchical caste system (caste status and inter-caste mobility restricted by birth)

Degenerated into fight for Rights

Characterised by fight for power, patronage and supremacy; decline in position of Shudras

Thus, it was precisely due to the overriding concern for rights ('adhiparvad') that India has been reduced to its present state. According to Vivekananda 'adhiparvad' had become synonymous with 'tam' (instinctive desires) since man, even if he belonged to the privileged class could not maintain his privileges as he had been drained spiritually. So, whether a man belonged to the higher strata or the lower made no difference whatsoever as all were interested in the realisation of their material desires. Since the hierarchical caste system had rigidified the role of the individual, Indian civilisation had also become inhuman. Thus, nothing short of a cultural revolution would bring India back to its blissful state of affairs.

Vivekananda also set out to explain that the British as well as the previous foreign conquerors were able to establish their suzerainty over India because India lay enchained in the tentacles of 'adhiparvad'. Vivekananda said that the establishment of a British political order would not bring back India's freedom since it did not lie in their hands. He, however, urged the people of India, especially the youth, to join the nationalist struggle under the auspices of the INC against the British in the hope that it would wake up the 'sleeping nation from all sides' and perhaps free India from the vice-like grip of 'adhiparvad'.

Vivekananda singled out the prevailing caste system in India as the all important cause for the present state of affairs in India. The way out would be to return to one's true religious self, and the first step towards freedom would be the emancipation of the poor by restoring dignity and respect (Ramakrishna Mission/ Mathas). He spoke at length about 'Daridra Narayan' or the 'poor as God' where service to the cause of their upliftment would raise the impoverished to a desired level of prosperity. This would then become the single most important desire of all within the folds of 'satwa', since true concern for others could only be the result of 'Truth' that bound. Vivekananda seems to be a supporter of equality since equality could bring back freedom. He also made a distinction between material and spiritual communism. One of the basic aims of the former was equal distribution of material resources. What appealed to Vivekananda was its obsession with equality. However, in such a system man was treated as a mere functionary composed of matter itself. The latter one was favoured by Vivekananda. Its setting was pre-political communism where there would be perfect harmony between freedom and equality. Thus a communistic society appeared to be standing at both ends of the spectrum of human civilisation. Society begins as a body of individuals equal to one another, then passes through instability, disequilibrium and turmoil and finally ends up as a community of equals. However, freedom formed the core of the former while in the latter one it was absent.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Critically examine Vivekananda's views on Freedom.

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17.3.2 Concept of Nationalism and Politics

Vivekananda elaborated and developed a theory of nationalism that was based on religion. According to him, like music, each nation had "a main note, a central theme" compared to which everything else was secondary. India's theme, he identified as religion and it had to be made the backbone of national life. The future greatness of any nation could be built only on the foundations of its past greatness. Religion had been a creative force of integration and stability and it helped to retrieve and strengthen even political authority when it became weak. He thus advocated the organization of national life on the basis of a religious ideal. But religion, in his conception was not a set of barbaric customs or a set of dogmas and rituals etc. It was rather, the realization of certain eternal principles.

On the basis of such a theory of nationalism, Vivekananda developed a conception about the relation of nationalism to politics and power. This conception of Vivekananda's had a lot in common with the western anarchist thought which viewed politics and power anywhere with suspicion. In his conception politics and power in India were linked to western influence. Anyone who knows India, in his opinion, must understand that politics, power, and even intellect form a secondary consideration here. Religion, therefore, is the one dominant consideration in India "So he showered ridicule on western political institutions like 'parliaments' which he referred to as 'jokes' and party politics, as degenerate 'fanaticism and sectarianism'. Preoccupation with political power was part of a distinctly western 'vanity' and 'material tyranny'.

In line with such a conception of nationalism, politics and power, was Vivekananda's emphasis on individual morality and social change. He believed that a nation is great or good because of the innate greatness, goodness of its people, and not because the

state so desires and enacts legislations to that effect. Here again religion is much more important since it moulds the individualities and conduct of people—makes them good or great. In his view, the spiritual tradition of Hinduism calls for resistance to the legalized oppression embodied in the crushing tyranny of castes, kings and foreigners.

It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that Vivekananda's ideas influenced the theory and practice of politics in India in such a decisive manner that hardly any subsequent political trend could break with the anarchist parameters set by him.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) What did nationalism mean to Vivekananda?

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17.4 V.D. SAVARKAR

17.4.1 A Biographical Sketch

V.D. Savarkar (May 1883-Feb. 1966)

Ardent nationalist and a heroic revolutionary terrorist, he came into the limelight by his daring political exploits in the early decades of the 20th century. He studied in England from 1906-1910 and simultaneously carried on revolutionary activities. In England he came into contact with other revolutionaries like Madam Cama, Lala Hardayal and Madan Lal Dhingra. He was sentenced to fifty years imprisonment and spent many years in the Andamans. In 1923 he was interned in Ratnagiri. Released from internment in May 1937, he joined the Democratic Swaraj Party and later the Hindu Mahasabha.

17.4.2 Political Ideas of Savarkar

V.D. Savarkar's political philosophy revolved around the nationhood of India. The geographical expression of Indian nationalism was equated with its cultural aspect. He intensely argued that contrary to the notion that Hinduism is a system of religion followed by a large number of Hindus, it is the 'Hindutva' or the Hindu factor residing in the minds and the conscience of Indian people that lay at the crux of India's nationhood. This 'Hindutva' thus encompassed the variety of religions indigenous to this land as also its people residing within the geographic proximity of the country. Emphasising his point Savarkar said:

"....that millions of our Sikhs, Jains, Lingayats, several Samajis and others would deeply resent to be told that they—whose fathers up to the tenth generation had the blood of Hindus in their veins.... had suddenly ceased to be Hindus..... Hindu dharma of all shades and schools, lives and grows and has its being in the atmosphere of Hindu culture, and the dharma of Hindu being so completely identified with the land of the Hindus, this land to him is not only 'Pitribhu' (fatherland) but 'Punyabhu' (holyland also)....."

He then went on to assert that since Hindus were born and bred in Hindustan their devotion and sacrifices for the country became limitless. Thus, it would not be wrong if we equate nationalism with the cultural aspects of the Hindu community. Hindus being a majority would shape the nation. The minorities, namely the Christians,

Muslims and Sikhs along with the Jains, in order to foster the growth of 'Hindutva', should co-operate freely with the majority and immerse themselves in the social, economic, and political life of the nation. While specifying the clear identity of the Hindu nation, Savarkar warned that those who have converted themselves for petty gains and advantages have no place in this sacred place. On another count he rejected the claims of Muslims and Christians as being equal partners to the cause of the nation. Political power could, then, only be shared with those whose emotional chords and sentiments lay in this country and who considered this country as their holy land (Jains, Sikhs, Lingayats, Samajists, etc.). Hindus would be willing to accept the assistance provided by the minorities in the process of building a unified India so long as proportional representation and equitability was stressed even at the level of civic and political life and matter of public appointments. But he would not accept a demand for equality; preferential treatment and sharing of power as equals, though equal rights and representation and fair competition on the basis of merit should be there.

Seeing the exigencies of the political situation brewing in the country at that time, the accommodative politics of the Congress and the dominance of Pan-Islamism, Savarkar delineated certain steps:

- 1) He extolled at length on the virtue and wisdom of Shivaji in keeping the Mughal rulers in check, to influence the Hindu community to galvanise itself against such intrusions by capturing the leadership in the leadership struggle.
- 2) The process of 'Shuddhikaran' or purification to bring back ex-Hindus into the Hindu fold. He felt that it would isolate the hardliners among the non-Hindus. Such an action taken by the majority Hindu community would mean a damage to India's composite national culture which also had Islamic contributions. But in the wake of increasing Muslim militancy, he saw no alternative way out.

Savarkar's position on many a matter of principle is very well laid out in the following quotation:

"A Hindu patriot worth the name cannot but be an Indian patriot as well. To the Hindus Hindustan being their fatherland and holyland, the love they bear to Hindustan is boundless. What is called nationalism can be defined as in fact the national communalism of the majority community..... Thus, in Hindustan it is the Hindus, professing Hindu religion and being in overwhelming majority, that constitutes the national community and create and formulate the nationalism of the nation. It is so in every country of the world..... The minorities, while maintaining their separate religions and civilisations, co-operate with the majority communities and merge themselves in the common life and administration of these countries."

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Critically examine Savarkar's political ideas.

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17.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you studied the political and other ideas of three leading figures of Hindu resurgence in 19th century India—Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda and

Savarkar. Their views insofar as the interface between religion and politics is concerned were made clear to you. This should help you in formulating your own views on the inter-relationship of politics and religion and get some insight into understanding events in contemporary India.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati,
Swami Vivekananda and
V.D. Savarkar

17.6 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Rai Lajpat: *A History of the Arya Samaj*, Orient Longman, 1967.

Jordens J.T.F.: *Dayanand Saraswati, His life and Ideas*, Oxford University Press, 1978.

Pantham Thomas and Deutsch Kenneth L: *Political Thought in Modern India*, Sage Publications, 1986, New Delhi.

17.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

See Section 17.2 and Sub-sections 17.2.1 and 17.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

See Sub-section 17.2.2

Check Your Progress 3

See Sub-section 17.3.1

Check Your Progress 4

See Sub-section 17.3.2

Check Your Progress 5

See Section 17.4 and Sub-sections 17.4.1 and 17.4.2