

Submitted for the Conference on ONENESS, Kochi, 15-17th Oct 2019,

Sub theme - Contemporary gurus of Advaita and their contribution

Full paper

Swami Chinmayananda and Swami Dayananda's contribution to the Vedanta sampradaya

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Sampradāya, the word comes from the Sanskrit root, da to give - that which has been handed down well and completely, *samyak pradānam* is *Sampradāya*. The Vedanta *sampradāya* which is a flowing tradition of knowledge is such because of the self knowledge handed down across generations in an unbroken lineage, that self knowledge indeed being *puranam*.

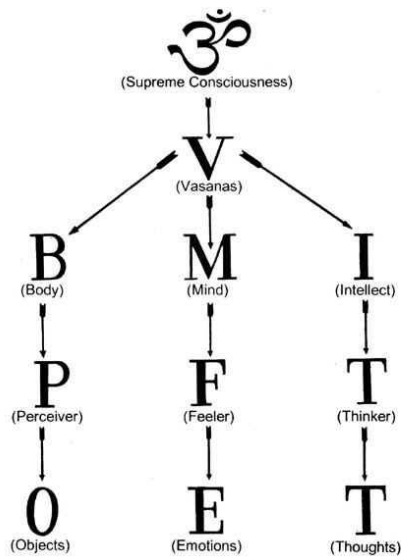
Across the ages, there have been gurus and disciples who eventually became gurus. In the recent past, after Swami Vivekananda and Ramana Maharshi, two traditional and contemporary teachers who have brought Vedanta to the masses across the world, especially the English speaking world have been Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993) and Swami Dayananda (1930-2015). Being a traditional teacher involves upholding and preserving the prakriya-s used in Vedanta while being contemporary involves contextualizing the problem of samsara and offering contemporary examples to help people see the relevance of Vedanta in their lives. We look at the contribution of these global gurus who changed the world through their teachings and projects.

Swami Chinmayananda (1916 – 1993) was a Hindu spiritual leader who inspired the formation of Chinmaya Mission, a worldwide nonprofit organisation, to spread the knowledge of Advaita Vedanta. The times in which he lived, the needs of the people, the conflicts of his times all of these contributed to how he responded in myriad ways for more than forty years of teaching. Some of his key contributions are -

- 1. Teachings of the Gita through Jnana Yajna-s** – Unlike traditional gurus who lived in remote places and were sought for their teachings, Swami Chinmayananda himself reached out with teachings to the masses across cities and towns. In the 1960s the first generation, modern English educated mind then was riddled with questions about modernity, science, religion and were largely skeptical. The teachings of the Gita were largely limited to families and to sadhus and not to the English speaking people who were largely householders. Using the very words of the Gita (*jnānāgni bhasmasāt kurute*), by his jnana yajna-s across the country he brought these to the masses. The Gita yajna-s were organized as a series of talks on chapters or the summary of each chapter over 18 days or sometimes the highlights of the Gita through 3 months across cities and towns.
- 2. Reaching out with no discrimination** – There was a perception among many that the teachings of the Veda were only for male Brahmins. Swamiji broke through Brahminical orthodoxy and gender exclusivity and reached out to all irrespective of jati, varna and gender. He initiated women into Vedic chanting as well as some of them into sannyasa.

His lectures were peppered with every day anecdotes and much humour, breaking notions of Vedanta being a serious pursuit only meant for sadhus in the Himalayas.

- 3. Medium of teaching and relatability** - In his own words, 'he hawked Vedanta' and he wanted 'to convert Hindus to Hinduism'. He largely taught in English across cities and small towns and later in different countries. The English educated masses could easily relate to him because of his background of being a journalist who was a skeptic of all sadhus. Of his assignment in meeting Swami Sivananda, he said- "I went not to gain knowledge, but to find out how the swamis were keeping up the bluff among the masses," said Swamiji. The young skeptical person became an enthusiastic renunciate, accepting sannyas initiation from none other than Swami Sivananda and learnt with Swami Tapovan Maharaj. This transformation resonated with many who were then inspired.



4. BMI chart as a teaching aid –

The BMI chart was a simple yet novel presentation of the human problem and solution. Through the **Body (B)**, **Mind (M)**, **Intellect (I)** the **Perceiver (P)**, **Feeler (F)**, **Thinker (T)** becomes enmeshed in the world of **Objects (O)**, **Emotions (E)** and **Thoughts (T)** But when we transcend our **Vasanas (V)** (by negation of ignorance) we realize our true Self **OM** the Supreme Reality.

- 5. Programs for all ages** - He pioneered and developed programmes for all ages starting with Bal Vihar (children), CHYK (youth), YEP (older youth) and Vedanta classes, study groups and retreats for adults. He authored 95 publications, including commentaries on the major Upanishad and Bhagavad Gita.
- 6. Response to Hindu conversions to Christianity** - In 1962 the pope was visiting India; Catholics had vowed to convert 108 Hindus to Christianity in each city the pope visited. Incensed at this predatory practice, Swamiji announced he would bring 1,008 back into the Hindu fold in each of the same cities. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was founded at Swami Chinmayananda's ashram in 1962, with Swamiji as the founder-chairman. Reconversion of those who converted through enticement or coercion continues to remain a central VHP goal. From 1964, Swamiji had no formal post with the VHP, but served as spiritual guide. According to Ashok Singhal, general-secretary of the VHP, Swami was responsible for the concept of the Hindu vote bank. Swamiji observed in 1988, "Strength in a democracy flows out of the power to vote, not just through physical strength."

7. **Hinduism in the US** -He raised hackles in the USA in 1979 with his pointed criticism of the failure of many Indian immigrants in the USA to infuse Hindu culture in their children and with the formation of temple societies among only family people without a guiding guru. He demanded and personally set through extensive adult and youth camps ways of upholding Hindu culture in the West.

Don't believe what I say! This is not Christianity or Mohammedism that I am talking! This is Hinduism! Do not believe what I say! Find it yourself! Realize it! Discover it through your own mental processes! Then live it! Put it to work in your lives! – Swami Chinmayananda

Padma bhushan Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930 – 2015) was a renowned traditional and contemporary global teacher of Advaita Vedanta, a visionary leader, founder of the Arsha Vidya gurukulam-s and spiritual Guru of honorable Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modi. For decades he tirelessly worked to establish 4 centres of teaching in Rishikesh, Coimbatore, Nagpur and Saylorsburg (USA) and initiated more than 250 sannyasi disciples and more than 500 full time teachers of Advaita Vedanta to continue the ancient tradition. Known as the guru of gurus, his role as a teacher and then as a visionary will be looked at.

As a teacher who upheld the sampradaya as well as addressing global audiences, Swami Dayananda offered clarity through contemporary and impactful presentations in a unique manner Some of them were –

1. **In psychology there is no solution and in Vedanta there is no problem** - Since the seventies, there was a rise in the influence of modern psychology in the West and in India along with a patronizing attitude towards religion. He pointed out the role and scope of modern psychology and spoke simply and extensively of taking care of the unconscious and the human need for infallibility. Other than the psychological disorders people faced, Swamiji would show how the human problem was not a psychological one but a spiritual problem of finitude. In the aligning of *jiva sr̥ṣṭi* to *Íśvara sr̥ṣṭi*, there was a focus on helping to transform subjectivity (*pr̥ātibhāsika satyam*) to functional reality (*vyāvahārika satyam*) such that the student could have the necessary *adhikaritam* to understand '*pāramārthika satyam*'. In presenting *Íśvara* as a super therapist alongside revealing *Íśvara* as *abhinna-nimitta-jagat-kāraṇam*, the person could now rest 'in the lap of *Íśvara*' thus discovering an abiding self acceptance.
2. **There was not one God, but Only God** – An attempt was made by other religions to classify Hinduism as polytheism as opposed to monotheism, with criticism for both sides. Swamiji cut through all that in revealing *Íśvara* as the *niyati*, which he then presented as the laws and principles governing the physical order, biological order, psychological order and karma order, he helped students recognise *Íśvara* 's all pervasive presence in themselves and all around. Thus, there being nothing to reject, this understanding of *Íśvara* helped neutralize insecurities enabling objectivity and relaxation and a readiness to understand the *svarupa* of *Íśvara*.
3. **Use and avoidance of certain words** – Recognising full well, the power of words to liberate or to bind, Swamiji did not use charts which might lead people to build further concepts. He used contemporary English and Sanskrit deftly without dumbing down or

diluting the impact of the Sanskrit words. He avoided words with physical connotation (like beyond heaven, substance, substratum, superimposition). Wherever possible he unfolded the meaning of the words and then used the Sanskrit word emphasizing that some words were just not translatable. Hence he used the word ‘*Sanātana dharma*’ and not religion, ‘*svarga*’ and not heaven, ‘*Īśvara*’ not God, ‘*śraddha*’ and not faith, ‘*mokṣa*’ and not salvation (because of Abrahamic connotations), ‘*Atma*’ and not soul. He did not use small i and big I in his teachings as he saw how they could create more concepts leading to a sense of separation. The presentation of the meaning of mithya as something illusory and false had created many problems in understanding. Hence by using the translation of mithya as having a dependent existence, Swamiji was able to clarify this fundamental understanding of *satyam* and *mithya*.

4. **Vedanta as a *pramāṇa* and not a system or a school of thought** - Recognising that Science had become the default religion for the masses, Swami ji did not try to make Vedanta scientific nor did he dismiss Science. He pointed out that Science was limited in its scope, based on perception and inference. He did not encourage blind religious belief, either. Indeed there was another means of knowledge to see oneself clearly through the mirror of Vedanta where words were used as a *pramāṇa*. The Brahmasutras clearly declare ‘*tasmāt siddham brahmanah śāstra pramāṇakam*’.

Unfolding Vedanta as a pramāṇa, that is, a means of knowledge, made both the demand of empirical scientific verification, as well as the demand for implicit and unquestioning belief, superfluous and inconsequential. – Swami Svatmananda

Through his grounding in the *sampradāya*, and resonance with *Sankarabhāṣya*, Swami Dayananda examined the many confusions that had crept into modern Vedanta and established that -

- a. All religions do not lead to the same goal,
- b. Self realisation is not an event or a special experience.
- c. All yogas (karma yoga, jnana yoga, bhakti yoga and raja yoga) do not lead to moksa
- d. An independent enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ will not reveal the Atma.

After succeeding in creating teachers of Vedanta, he turned his attention to some critical issues of contemporary importance which would have long-term implications for India and the world. From 2000-2015 he spearheaded far reaching projects –

1. Founding of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha — a platform uniting all Hindu *sampradāyas* (traditions) so that they could speak with one voice nationally as well as internationally. Swamiji initiated the Hindu-Jewish and the Hindu-Buddhist Summits, both transformative theological dialogues.
2. Aim-for-Seva movement — a unique social movement for more than 3000 disadvantaged children focused on free education and healthcare through student homes (chhatraalaya-s) in rural and tribal areas of India.
3. ‘Conversion is violence’ – At the founding of the Dharma Rakshana Samiti in Chennai in 1999, a unique confluence of saints and intellectuals, Swami Dayananda made one of his most memorable speeches where he declared that the very concept of religious conversion

itself was violence — a spiritual, mental and cultural violence. Until then conversion had some acceptability and was seen as a right amongst proselytizing religions to convert others. S. Gurumurthy, the economist, recognises this speech and related actions as ..” *amongst the greatest contributions of Swami Dayananda to global inter-religious discourse. The redefinition of religious conversion as violence robbed the concept of conversion of benignity and exposed its malignant character.*”

4. Mutual respect of all religions (Adoption by the UN) - In the human rights declaration of world religious leaders in Amsterdam on December 10, 2008 on the 60th anniversary of the UN Human Rights Declaration, all world religious leaders, including the proselytising faiths, accepted the Dayananda approach — namely that religions should mutually respect and accept each other, that they should not abuse or trivialise one another’s faiths or symbols, that they should recognise the right of a person to be in the religion of his birth, and that there should be no conversion by force or by inducement — and signed the historic declaration.
5. Projects for Sanatana dharma - By approaching the court, Swamiji could rescue the Rama-Setu bridge from certain desecration. He continued to be a tireless champion of *Vaidika* Dharma through countless other initiatives and projects.

In conclusion, both Swami Chinmayananda and Swami Dayananda helped to change the world by taking Vedanta to the masses, transforming the lives of thousands while they continued to serve the Vedanta *sampradāya* through their selfless, deeply inspirational lives of blessings and teachings for generations to come.

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