

PLATO AND DAYANAND

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When an Indian student studies Greek philosophy, he marvels at the coincidences that he finds between Greek and Indian thought. Resemblance between various views sometime amounts almost to likeness. Greek philosophers seem to have imbibed and assimilated the spirit of the Indian thought to such an extent that we are compelled to conclude (as we believe in transmigration) that they were Indian souls in Greek bodies. History stands witness to the fact that Greece has largely drawn upon Indian thought. The influence ran through Persia and Egypt and certain Greek thinkers even visited oriental countries to sit at the feet of the Indian philosophers to gain the benefit of personal contact and supreme touch of life. Weber in his 'History of Philosophy' goes so far as to identify Pythagoras with Buddha, while he traces similarities even as regards the details of their lives and the rules and regulations of the brotherhoods they founded. Colebrooke comes to the same conclusion: "Adverting to what has come to us of the history of Pythagoras I shall not hesitate to acknowledge an inclination to consider the correction to have been indebted to Indian instructors." We make quote here another authority. Barthelemy is of opinion that "Plato the great admirer of the Pythagorean school took his doctrines from Pythagoras but if we speak where Pythagoras obtained them all appearances are in his opinion in favor of India."

Pythagoras does not seem to be the first Greek whose philosophy reveals an Indian impress but even beyond and before him the early Greek thinkers who occupy themselves with scientific speculation as to the origin, cause and destiny of the material universe such as Eleatics, Xenophanes, Anaximander, Empedocles and Anaxagoras, all based their philosophy dictum *ex nihilo nih* which is in other words the exact *sankhya sutra* नावस्तुनो वस्तु सिद्धिः 1-68 (something cannot come out of nothing).

While Greek thought and wisdom forms the basis of the structure of all modern knowledge in Europe, it is a great pity that European riders at the history of philosophy with a single exception of Hazel have persistently ignored, rather neglected to find a place for the discussion of Indian philosophical thought in their otherwise bulky volumes. Even Hegel, biased by his extreme idealism and impelled by his central doctrine of "Thought Reality" misunderstood the spirit of Indian philosophy and turned and twisted it to fit it to himself-evolved, arbitrary one-sided theory of "Progressive embodiment of Reason." In the present article we would not attempt a defense of Indian philosophy and its permanent achievement in the domain of speculation nor to hold a general comparison between the Greek and Indian thought but we shall impose upon ourselves the humbler task of selecting two unique apostles of life and thought: one - Plato belonged to antiquity, adorned the galaxy of Greek intellect, the father of idealism and the rich storehouse of varied information concerning Greek life and manners; the other - a modern apostle of India Swami Dayanand - to show the exact coincidences between their views on certain social, religions, educational, ethical and metaphysical subjects.

Our main purpose in view is to make clear the fact that every age, generally presents before its mighty intellects the simple same fundamental problems for solution, and the solution offered, and the attitude taken by the great minds is almost always the same. What Plato had to think and do for his country in his own times was roughly the same with which Dayanand had to grapple in India. And why is this so? The Problem of Human Life, provided it is seriously considered individually or socially, does indeed present similar difficulties in all ages, for, though the circumstances and conditions are always changing the spirit meets fundamentally the same temptations and fight primarily the same battles in this world of weal and woe.

Great names like great ideas have to struggle hard to reach the prominence they so richly deserve. Plato's name has been honored in all lands where Greek thought has penetrated and Greek civilization is studied. Dayanand's name has just freshly launch into the era of struggle and it is matter of great satisfaction defined or even at such an early stage his manifold activities, his determined attitude towards the problem of life and the solutions offered remedies proposed pay him for the removal of his country sufferings are widely appreciated and the time is near at hand when great names in history shall bear testimony to the great gifts of the head and heart he possessed.

Dayanand, like Plato, was born of a good family and was fortunate in having the great Virjanand for his master, just as the latter was proud of having Socrates as his teacher. The many works of Plato are all cast in the form of imaginary dialogs written for the propagation of ethical political scientific and metaphysical teachings amongst his countrymen. Leaving aside the commentaries on the Vedas, Dayanand wrote his masterpiece, 'The Satyarth Prakash' in the form of questions and answers. This is perhaps the best method of eliciting truth. Enquiry proceeds step-by-step the opposing views come under discussion one after another, leading the mind to analyze the statement, criticize its parts and then naturally the inquirer finds in his possession materials to synthesize for the final grasp of the point.

Their Attitude towards Sophism

India before Dayanand like Greece before Plato was flooded with Sophists whose main business in life was to criticize good and bad, right and wrong with no constructive end in view. While in Greece political conditions favor Sophism, in India religion furthered its cause. In Greece, circumstances created a class of teachers who prepared young men for high political ambitions and trained them in the art of speech to make successful speakers. These professional teachers of skill and tag were called Sophists. The course of training which they offered was least conducive to a healthy growth of ethical spirit and young men and the successful speakers thus trained could stand on either side of the question and win laurels even at the cost of their consciousness. This excessive prostitution of intellect unhinged the fulcrum of Greek morality and the lack of ethical side of life amongst the Greeks was so keenly felt that the Spirit of Time rose in revolt incarnated in the form of Socrates who fought so successfully the skeptic attitude of the surface that the stability of ethical principles like justice, temperance, etc., was one more established and successful check that he offered to Greek sophism was made firmer and stronger by the efforts and writings of Plato, his favorite disciple. Religion in India supplied the place of politics. Religious office by their false and one-sided teachings

influenced the country widely. India was priest-ridden before the advent of Dayanand. Various sects of Hinduism under the guidance of godless lovers of gain were converted into a narrow and selfish barter and sale processes. Priests instead of ministering to the spiritual interest of the people looked forward to filling the pockets with the best that the laity could offer. The false spirit of Vedantic doctrine of Maya was freely taught to the people while their own grasping, worldly nature grew greedier still with every increase of their worldly possessions. The spirits of the people were dulled, their sensibilities annihilated. The doctrine of dependence upon Fate and abject resignation amidst adverse circumstances was the final refuge. Their great doctrine of Karma was now superseded by the passivity and inactivity into which they were drawn by their sceptical teachers-the keeps of their conscience. Dayanand like Socrates arose and like Plato was possessed of critical reflection and a searching attitude of mind. Like Plato he was also a gainless lover of God. Both were constructive in plans and practical in their interests. Both were impelled by the passionate desire of vindicating truth and eradicating the spirit of Sophism which found its chief pleasure in destructive work of negative Truth. Both philosophy was practical and thorough and its study was the sure remedy of the ills of humanity. In the days of Dayanand, it was so easy to slip towards Vedantic teachings, for the gospel of inactivity was so extensively preached and Dayanand had so many chances of becoming the leader of thought in those circles. But like Plato he manfully opposed the Sophist teachings of the priestly classes and placed before his people a constructive program of life. Though his teachings are old in the popular sense of the word, yet they are new to exactly fit in with modern conditions. Besides, Truth is never old. It is always fresh, new and invigorating. The center of his philosophy was life and he preferred activity to passivity.

Their Attitude towards Mythology

Every country has its Mythology. Every great mind has to face it and to determine his attitude towards it. Mythology represents the collective stupidity of the masses. People generally yield before the overweening force of Tradition and either accept literally the myths handed down to them in their forefathers or begin rationalizing them to their own satisfaction. Plato did neither. He rejected all that seemed absurd to him. So did Swami Dayanand. The grotesque, childish fancies inculcated in Puranas found no favor with him. Plato expressly forbids the teachings to the children of the stories and fables which Hesiod and Homer told. Plato gives his reason for doing so. "For a child cannot discriminate between what is allegory and what is not; and whatever at the age is adopted as a matter of belief, has a tendency to become fixed and indelible, and therefore perhaps, we ought to esteem it of the of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue." In his education program, Plato has emphasized the fact that children should not be taught that the gods fight with another, inflict pain upon men or appear on earth in a variety of forms. The reader of the "Republic" cannot help being stuck with marvel at the great liberty of thought which Plato takes while criticizing the current opinions of his day. His criticism and condemnation of Greek Theology reminds of Dayanand's polemics against Puranic Theology. The Satyarth Prakash brims over with statesmen as biting and critical as we find the 'Republic." At places the arguments resemble and the ideas coincide. Dayanand could never have succeeded in India, had he not attacked directly the Puranic orthodoxy which enslaved the

head and heart of so many millions of ignorant people deprived of the benefits of free and liberal education.

Theory of Education – Plato and Dayanand.

The problem of education is in fact the great problem of Life and its preparation. Its right solution involves the right understanding of the origin, purpose and destiny of human life. No nation can draw a satisfactory program of education if it takes a lower view of life, if it ignores its grand potential and infinite possibilities. The systems of Greek and Indian education have much in common though Plato's educational ideal was narrowed by his extreme desire to subordinate individual interests in every respect to the interests of the State. The State was in fact conceived by the Greeks to be the only environment that provided for the growth of individual souls and there it could demand every sacrifice of person and principle on the part of the citizen. Dayanand's ideal was much higher. It included in itself the complete development of self not narrowly conceived as individual and social but as spiritual and cosmopolitan. Hence the values of life were regarded as spiritual and the principles of life demanded greater allegiance than the temporary, fleeting regulations of States which are merely means to the development of individual souls and not the end of their final satisfaction. Dayanand's concept of education included both nature and nurture, hence a very extensive program. It begins before the child is born, even before it is conceived. Wife and husband are strictly enjoined to prepare themselves for the reception of the newcomer and thus to guard their minds from all ideas of lust and their bodies from all indulgences. Thus, with a healthy mind and body they have to take to the procreative act with no other desire than that of race-preservation. When this high ideal of morality is not maintained, many children born will only be chance-results and will start on their life careers with all the moral and bodily deficiencies of their parents. Once the moral sanctions are disregarded and the spiritual sentiments that consecrate marriage are rejected, the resulting civilization will be no better than naturalistic culture in which material interests engross the minds of the people and the values of human life are much lowered to the detriment of divinity in man. Let me briefly summarize the main idea of education of these two great men.

Plato	Dayanand
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education should be compulsory. 2. The state should look at it. 3. Co-education of boys and girls is strictly prohibited. 4. Strict celibacy enjoined during the period of Education. 5. All objectionable poetry and prose prohibited. 6. Princes and peasants should read together. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education should be compulsory. 2. The State and Society should both look at it. 3. Co-education of boys and girls is strictly prohibited. 4. Strict celibacy enjoined during the period of Education. 5. All objectionable poetry and prose prohibited. 6. Prince and peasants should read

<p>7. Music and dancing sanctioned sparingly.</p> <p>8. The prime of life may be reckoned at a period of 20 years for a woman and 30 years for a man.</p>	<p>together and be treated alike.</p> <p>7. Music and dancing sanctioned sparingly.</p> <p>8. Prime of life - 16 years for a girl and 25 years for a man - but the period of celibacy for a woman may extend to 20 and 24, while for a man to 36 and 48 years.</p>
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The highest aim of education according to Plato is to produce the true Philosophic Disposition in the Students, the characteristics of which he counts in the Book VI as follows:

1. An eager desire for knowledge of all Reality.
2. Hatred of falsehood and devoted love of truth.
3. Contempt for the pleasures of the body.
4. Indifference to money.
5. Justice and gentleness.
6. Quick apprehension and a good memory.
7. Musical, regular and harmonious disposition.

Swami Dayanand quotes from Mahabharata in support of his own view as to the qualifications of an educated person. In the 4th Chapter (Satyarth Prakash) we read that “he should never be idle or lazy, nor affected by pleasure or pain, profit or loss, honor or dishonor, public applause or censure, that he should be able to grasp the most abstruse subject in a very short time, should have unbounded faith in God and apply his knowledge for the good of other.”

Caste System, Greek and India

The Caste System has been considered as the most distinctive feature of Indian Religions. However diverse they may be in other respects they almost all agree on the point of caste considerations. The (Varna) System can be traced back to the vedas where the four-fold division of mankind is mentioned. In the beautiful Rigveda Mantra (30-2 organic view of Society is clearly enunciated. The human organism is compared with society as an organism. Bodily organs such as head, hands, thighs (legs) and feet with their respective functions are compared with the four corresponding organs of Society, i.e., classes with their respective duties. Dayanand’s interpretation of this System is unique. It is better here to summarize his views. According to him, Varna or the four-fold division of society is based upon the universal principles of the “Division of Labour”. The Human Society can be roughly divided into four Sections:

1. Deliberative - consisting of Brahmins, the altruistic teachers of humanity;
2. Protective - consisting of Khashtriyas or Military Class-Soldiers;

3. Productive - consisting of Vaishyas - traders and commercial classes;
4. Serving - consisting of Shudras, menial servants - unskilled to occupy the higher services of Society.

Now thus interpreted the system naturally resolves itself into class-distinction which results from the distinction of worth and merit of the individuals. The worth and merit are determined by competencies - the quality and quantity of Education received and the conduct and character achieved. The universal spirit of class-distinction admits of differences of taste and capacities also, which individuals or groups of individuals acquire through experience. Such a natural system of class-distinction must not be confused with the present caste system in Hinduism which recognizes birth as the most potent factor in determining an individual's rank in the social scale. A Brahman's son, however mean and miserable he may be, enjoys social privileges which the son of a Kshatriya or Vaishya is deprived of. To universalize the principle underlying the system and to protest against the vested interest of the priestly classes in India was to strike an axe at the very root of Orthodoxy. This Herculean task was reserved for Dayanand and he proved himself equal to it.

The spirit of this principle Plato wanted to introduce in Greek Society of his day to ensure the best possible social organization amongst his people, but the motive that prompted him to do so was not the universality of the principle but its utility for his "Republic". To him it was clear that the stability of a state depends upon its citizens doing the work they are best fitted for. This was possible only when they recognized the distinction of different classes with their respective functions. The unity of society must exist in the diversity of occupations. Plato felt that the interests of his State demanded that a principle similar to वर्ण व्यवस्था (Varna or class-distinction) in India, should be somehow incorporated in the social polity of Greece. But he was afraid lest his people would object to this innovation. He therefore took resort to the fabrication of a healthy myth in the third book of his "Republic" which makes people regard their country as their mother and their fellow-citizens as their brothers while their differences are accounted for by the gold, silver or copper-compositions in their dispositions. The resulting division of society in three sections, 1) Rulers of Philosophers, 2) Auxiliaries or military class, and 3) Cultivators or workmen exactly corresponds to the division of society into Brahmans, Kashtriyas and Vaishas as recognized by the Indian people. The fourth class (Shudra) is included in the 3rd section of Greek Society. Thus Plato and Dayanand believed in a similar social organization of Society based upon the universal principle of "Division of Labour".

Similarities of Metaphysical Views

The Metaphysical views of Plato, one has to gather from his various dialogues such as the "Republic", "Parmenides," "Phaedo," "Protagoras," etc., while Dayanand's view one can clearly find enunciated in the Sayarth Prakash written by himself. The study of their works leads us to conclude that:

Both believed in

1. A Universal Intelligence as the Creator and Preserver of the Universe; both were Monotheists, Plato's recognition of Gods is similar to Dayanad's recognition of Devas; and both rejected the Incarnation Theory

2. The pre-existence of the soul and its eternity.
3. The boundless Plurality of souls.
4. Transmigration
5. Matter as a separate entity from spirit.
6. Purposive nature of the Universe.
7. .
8. The perfection of man's existence consists in realizing his true harmony with God.
9. Salvation as freedom from births and deaths.
10. "Deeper insight" or "Yogic vision" of a highly cultivated soul.
11. Universal Truths and Immutable Laws.

Plato's "Theory of Ideas" and Dayanand's Veda

The central idea of Plato's Philosophy is contained in his famous "Theory of Ideas," which draws a distinction between the sense-world and the thought-world. In the former is located all change, impermanence and the shifting show of the visible, sensible existence, while in the latter are relegated permanent "concepts" or "ideas" which are the real realities much more real than the world of sense. All that this world presents are mere "Copies," "types" of the eternal "archetypes" of the noumenal world. Sometimes Plato thinks that these archetypal ideas remain in and before the Divine Mind, and sometimes he is of the opinion that they exist as "model forms" or "laws" in nature which are revealed to the individual souls through deep contemplation. Many critics of Plato have interpreted this theory as a mere discussion of Universals and Particulars; others have attributed it to the poetic element in his philosophic disposition. Whatever may be the case, this theory demands a different explanation than hitherto given by the Western savants. As we have shown already that Greek Philosophy partook of a great deal of Indian Thought, this "theory" can also be understood and appreciated in the light of the same thought, otherwise the metaphysical ideas of Plato do not at all fit in with the general ideas conveyed by this theory. Plato's belief in individual souls, their pre-existence and eternity, his theory of Reminiscence or Recollection according to which knowledge is only an interpretation of ideas pre-existing, and Transmigration Theory which he also shares in common with the Indian Philosophers, all these can be justified in his "Theory of Ideas" be interpreted in the light of the concept of "Veda," the "eternal word" held by Indian sages and received and restored by Dayanand. Dayanand endorses the "Veda" as the "eternal verities," the Universal principles, the unchanging laws, the immutable truths whether they be physical, moral or metaphysical. He thinks that they constitute Gods' knowledge and are transmitted to Humanity through the "Yogic Vision" of rishis, seers who can see through things and can grasp the divine truths by means of their fully developed insight. This view of Dayanand is strengthened by the fact that a similar position has been accorded to the "Veda" by almost all of the philosophers in India. The Veda has been recognized as स्वतः प्रमाण "self-proving", truth-like the Sun which is self-effulgent and reveals its own nature. This position is very much like the position taken up by recent writers in the philosophical circles of the West such as Mr. Moor who thinks that the validity of moral judgments is quite independent of the feelings of approval or disapproval which an individual or a society might entertain towards them. Truth is not man-made as Pragmatists believe but it is

man-understood. Man slowly finds the moral laws, just as he gradually discovers the Physical laws. Man's study and knowledge is only an interpretation of the Universal Code- the "Veda" disseminated by Dayanand or the "Ideas" of Plato.

We may quote here certain high authorities who have also understood by the "Theory of Ideas" an attempt to recognize the Universality Truth. Prof. Eucken, in his remarkable book "Problem of Human Life" (English translation) thus speaks of the 'Theory of Ideas': "However much that is problematic may remain in Plato's doctrine of Ideas, the latter discloses a great Truth which we cannot relinquish. And that is the recognition of the fact that there is a realm of truth beyond the likes and dislikes of men; those truths are valid, not because of our consent but independently of it, and in a sphere raised above all human opinion and power." We can gather almost similar views from the pages devoted to the elucidation of Plato's Philosophy in the first volume of Dr. Ueberweg's "History of Philosophy ". Prof. Marshall in his "Short History of Greek Philosophy" writes about Plato's ideas - "These regulative, underlying, permanent elements are ideas, i.e., general forms or notions which although they may come second as regards time into consciousness, are by reason known to have been there before, because through them alone can the sensations become intelligibly possible or thinkable or namable." These evidences are enough to support the reconciliation of Dayanand's interpretation of "Vedas" and Plato's "Theory of Ideas." Thus we have shown the fundamental unity of the most important views of two master-minds of the world revealing thereby - "Th'o old, th'o new. What does it mote, If tale and rote, Are only true!"

(copy-edit by Editorial Team)

Editorial note:

There is a mention in Plato's Apology pertaining to Socrates' affirmation: "I neither know nor think that I know", abridged as what is known as the Socratic Paradox: "I know that I know nothing". This is a parallel to the Vedic edict "Atma (soul) is अल्पज्ञ (*alpajna*), ignorant, with little knowledge and Ishvar (God) असर्वज्ञ (*Sarvajna*), Omniscient, All-knowledgeable and the Source of all true knowledge.