

Examining the Life of Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi : An Inquiry into Legitimizing the Vedic Science.

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The paper would chronicle the life history of Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi (1864-1890) and along with it map out the various trajectories that led to the legitimization of Vedic sciences as a parallel world view as opposed to Eurocentric scientific learning. The credit for infusing a new life into the pursuit of scientific temper undoubtedly can be attributed to Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi. All his life his zeal for Vedic science can be traced to the belief that Vedic Rishis knew the link between mathematics and religion. The scientific and spiritual life was intertwined in Vedic India. Mathematical formulas and laws were often taught within the context of spiritual expression (mantra). Undoubtedly for all this and much more Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi was an iconic figure in the scientific, educational, cultural and political history of colonial India. His endeavor for the expansion of Vedic scientific temper and Vedic knowledge is considered path-breaking. The late 19th century and the early 20th century during British rule in India constituted a period of Indian “revitalization” — in science, arts, and literature. Pandit Guru Datta was the product of this period. It was a period of cultural and intellectual upheaval which threw up outstanding men and women who committed themselves to construct a progressive and self-contained independent India. This Research Paper provides an insight into the life and works of Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi and his attitudes towards western science and technology and later his campaigns to spread Vedic science which was losing its magnitude due to the introduction of new science and technology in British era. It is imperative to mention that he was the first Indian professor of western science in Government College, Lahore but his historic contribution was in the field of popularising Vedic science and Vedic knowledge among the common people. He was an enthusiastic educationist, a fierce patriot, a devoted social worker and the catalyst behind popularising Vedic knowledge among populace amidst the fire of new western science. During the short span of his life of only twenty six years, he was able to make a difference in this world.

Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi was born on 26th April 1864 in Multan (Punjab). His father was a renowned scholar of Persian Language and Literature and was a teacher in a Government school in Jhang (Punjab). His mother was very religious minded. Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi since the early childhood acquired the quality of religiosity from his mother. He developed enthrallment for the celestial, heavenly and unearthly entity. The time had a great effect on him. Pandit Gurudatta was taken away from theism as the Macalay's system of English education laid a heavy hand on him. On successful completion of high school education in Multan, Gurudatta moved to Government College Lahore from where he eventually got a Master's degree in Physical. Ruchi Ram Sahni (a great Scientist), Lala Lajpat Rai (an Indian Punjabi author and politician) and Mahatama Hansraj (an Indian educationist and follower of Arya Samaj) were his college mates and friends. All were supporters of western science and technology and wanted to bring

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transformation in Indian society with the help of new science and technology initiated by British in India. Pandit Gurudatta was so much engrossed in new education that he spent his spare hours in College Veranda with Ruchi Ram Sahni. Both used to read remarkable books on science. These were John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism and Jeremy Bentham's Theory of Legislation. These books were not included in the college course. Driven by curiosity and the need to understand the new anglicized world, Pandit Guru Datta and Ruchi Ram Sahni struggled with strange concepts in a foreign tongue. They read and re-read Mills's small book line by line, or paragraph by paragraph, discussing, arguing, differing or agreeing in the end. Every day and every hour new opinions on western science were borrowed. Pandit Gurudatta's progress in grasping and assimilating new ideas and facts went on increasing. His liking for western science reached to such an extent that he turned into an atheist. But his atheism did not stay alive for long. This was the time, when the ideology of Arya Samaj (founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati- the great saint-reformer) was creating far reaching impact on the people far and wide, Pandit Guru Dutta Vidhyarthi could not remain untouched. On 20th June, 1880, he became the member of Lahore Arya Samaj. Later when Swami Dayanand fell ill, Pandit Gurudatta Vidhyarthi went to Ajmer with other members of Arya Samaj of Lahore to meet him. He saw him being very calm, composed and peaceful despite his illness. The Pandit Gurudatta Vidhyarthi felt very impressed. His meeting with Swami Dayanand changed his outlook and the spread of Vedic knowledge became the mission of his life. He had been once again changed from atheist to theist. To get himself acquainted with Vedic knowledge, first of all he read 'Satyarth Prakash', then he mastered Vedang Prakash of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati with the help of Ashtadhyayi. He founded a 'Debating Society' and started a newspaper 'Regenerator of Arya Varta' and later he started a 'Vedic Magazine' to spread Vedic knowledge with fervour and zeal. In June 1888 his book 'The Terminology of the Vedas' was published. His book 'Terminology of Vedas' had been prescribed in the course in Oxford University. He also published with English connotations – 'Ishopnishad'. 'The Realities of Inner Life' was published in 1890. His other books are – Evidences of Human Spirit, Pecuniomania, Criticism of Monier Williams, Indian Wisdom. He also wrote many articles of great importance – Conscience and the Vedas, Religious Sermons, Origin of Thought and Language, Man's Progress Downwards, and Righteousness or unrighteousness of Flesh Eating etc. That is how Guru Datta's personality moved totally towards bhakti and devotionism. He envisioned the Arya Samaj as a religious movement, not as primarily educational or social. His fascination with Aryanism finally led him to question English education, western science and Western Knowledge. By and by, he took up the extreme attitude that learning English was useless despite the fact that it was the only mean to have an access to western knowledge. He was reported to have expressed once the wish that he could forget all his western learning and become an unalloyed Sanskritist.

According to Pandit Guru Dutta Vidhyarthi, Vedic knowledge and science complemented each other in a hierarchical arrangement with Vedic truth superior to all other forms of Knowledge. Modern science, especially as far as chemistry was concerned, was extremely defective, when judged by the different tests of a true science. The methods on which it was pursued, differed widely from those on which considered in the light of calm reason, were undoubtedly the only ones on which the structure of science could be raised on a sound basis. The ancient methods

were simple, certain and unerring, and hence it was that the researches and conclusions of the ancient experts were beyond question. Pandit Guru Datta elaborated on the theme of Vedic knowledge as ultimate, beyond question and all embracing, while scientific knowledge—useful as it might be remained limited in its capacity to establish truth. He further added that the modern scientist might dissect every nerve and bone, subject every drop to a most searching examination under the most powerful microscope he could possibly have, but he was as hopelessly lost over his question as ever. He could not undo the mystery of life. That question could not be solved but by the aid of the Vedas. The Vedas alone could disentangle that grand mystery. Pandit Guru Datta went to great lengths to establish the scientific nature of the Vedas, using the scheme of reinterpretation laid down by Dayanand. To him, technology as well as science and the ultimate answers to all questions were contained in the Vedas. Steamships, telegraphy, and cannons existed within the Vedas. The ancient Aryans had known about and invented all the gadgetry of the contemporary world. In this way Pandit Guru Datta successfully opened the way to an elaboration of the Arya past. With the Vedas he added, the Arya stood forth both as civilized and civilizer. To him, the English derived the rudiments of their civilization from Romans, and the Romans from Greeks, and the Greeks from Egyptians, and the Egyptians from Hindus, or more properly speaking, Aryas.

Gradually Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi drew around him a circle of disciples devoted both to the Samaj and to his person. By 1888, Guru Datta's disciples included a group of traditional Sanyasis who acknowledged him as their spiritual leader. Together they studied the Vedas Vedic commentaries, Sanskrit grammars, and Western science. Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi organized classes in the Mahabhashya of Patanjali and Panini's Ashtadhyayi for member of the Samaj and an Updeshak class to train Arya missionaries. He showed a passionate drive toward religious commitment and spiritual satisfaction. He inspired in those who followed him an ardent belief in his own leadership as well as a religious and deeply emotional commitment to the Samaj. In the last years of his life, he could bear no criticism of the great rishi Dayanand Saraswati or his works. His religiosity pulled Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi away from the mainstream of the Samaj and in particular, from those who retained a moderate or rationalistic conceptualization of the movement and its purposes. Pandit Gurudatta Vidyarthi was not satisfied with the scheme of studies envisaged in the future DAV schools and colleges. He opined that these institutions were not be founded with the object of supplying clerks, judicial officers and engineers. Such professions fell far short of Dayanand's mission. His ideas gave birth to a controversy over education among the members of the Arya samaj . Pandit Gurudatta Vidyarthi favoured Sanskrit and Arya bhasha (hindi) to be taught to students and stressed for study of Satyarth Prakash , Rigvedadi Bhashya Bhumika and Panini's Ashtadhyayi. But his schemes were not taken up seriously by the managing committee of the college. This resulted into the division of members of Arya Samaj-College party and Gurukul party. College party favoured western education in English language and Gurukul Party spoke for vedic education in Sanskrit or Hindi language to be introduced in school or college curriculum. In 1884, he opened Arya Samaj Science Institution.

In the last months of 1889, his health broke down and he died on March 19, 1890. Though , it was a big loss for Arya Samaj and supporter of sanskritists, yet Lala Munshi Ram carried his principals

and continued his struggle for a sanskritic orientation in the scheme of studies and finally founded a Gurukul at Kangri in 1902 and he came to be known as Swami Shraddhanand. In retrospect, we conclude that Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi was one of those rare geniuses of whom any civilized country may justly be proud. He in his very brief life time revealed the virtues of a Great man. He was a Great intellectual and a Great visionary. He was a multi-faceted personality. His body, mind and wealth were all at the service of the Arya Dharma and his only occupation was the discovery and revelation of the Vedic authenticity.

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