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KASHI SHASTRARTH

Famous Religious Debate between Swami Dayanand Saraswati
and the Pandits of Benarasat Kashi

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Preface

Kashi Shastrartha gives an account of the famous religious debate which took place between Swami Dayanand Saraswati and the Pandits of Benaras under the Chairmanship of the Maharaja of Benaras on Tuesday the 16th November 1869 A.D. The Subject of the debate was 'whether idol worship is sanctioned by the Vedas'. The pandits failed to prove that it is. The Shastrarth took place in Sanskrit but Hindi Version was also given when it was first published in the form of a book. The English translation of the Shastrartha was long felt need and we are happy to announce that late R.B.Ratan Lalji of Merrut was kind enough to translate the same. Dr. Bhawani Lal Bhartiya, M.A., Ph.D. has thoroughly seen the translation and compared it with the original.

We hope the publication of this book will enlighten the readers.

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KASHI SHASTRARTH

A Sanyasi by the name of Dayanand Saraswati wearing his langot only keeps going along the banks of the Ganges and knows the true shastras and his personality is a symbol of truth. He has studied and meditated upon Vedas deeply with the result that he contends that there is no sanction whatsoever in the Vedas for idolatry or worship of stocks and stones or for the marks on foreheads or for the rudrakash necklace of the Shaivites, Ganpatya and Vaishnava and other sects (of Hindus). Hence all these ceremonials are false and no one should follow and practice them, for, it is a great sin to practice what is against the Vedas and not supported by them, for, the Vedas themselves lay down that rule of human conduct.

Hence Swami Dayanand started criticism and condemnation of all those ceremonials in Hardwar and followed it up all along the banks of the Ganges and has arrived at Kashi (Varanasi) and is staying at Anand Bagh near Durga Kund. The news of his arrival spread like wildfire in the whole city, and many pandits of Kashi began to study the Vedas but nowhere found sanction for idol worship in them, though most of them insisted upon that worship.

The Swami's fearless and thorough exposure of idolatry at last aroused the Maharaja (Ruler) of Kashi and he called many

pandits and asked them how to meet it. After final agreement amongst themselves they told the Ruler that there should be a religious debate with Swami Dayanand Saraswati and the ancient ceremonials should be upheld in it, somehow or other.

In short on Tuesday, the 16th November 1869 the Maharaja of Kashi came along with many Pandits to hold a religious debate with Swami Dayanand. The latter asked the ruler whether he brought the Vedas.

The ruler replied that the Pandits know the Vedas by heart, there is no necessity of the books. Dayanand remarked that without books there cannot be accurate consideration of previous and following contexts. However, there need be no books but then what is to be the subject of debate.

The Pandits retorted that you condemn idol worship and we shall prove that it must be practiced. Thereupon the Swami Dayanand requested that one pandit who may be the head of all may come forward for the debate.

Pandit Raghunath Prasad Kotwal (Police Station Officer) also laid down that only one Pandit at a time should hold debate with the Swami.

(debate commences here)

Thereupon first of all Pandit TaraCharan Nyayik stepped forward for the debate.

Dayanand: Do you recognize the authority of the Vedas?

Taracharan: All those who believe in Varnashram believe in the authority of the Vedas by all means.

Dayanand: Is there any authority in the Vedas for the worship of Idols of stone or other materials? If there be, cite that hymn of the Veda, if there be no such hymn please say so.

Taracharan: Whether there is or is not a hymn in the Vedas to that effect is a different matter but what should be said of one who asserts that the Vedas alone are authoritative and no other book whatsoever?

Dayanand: Consideration of the other books may be taken up later on. Consideration of the Vedas themselves is the principal thing. Hence the Vedas should be taken up first, for the action enjoined in the Vedas is the Principal rule of conduct. Manu and other smritis also support the Vedas. Hence these are also authoritative but is should be noted which ever book lays down anything contrary to the Vedas or what is not acknowledged by Veda is to that extent not authoritative.

Taracharan: Where is the origin of Manusmriti specified in the Vedas?

Dayanand: It is written in the Brahmana of the Samveda that what Manu has said is the remedy of the remedies.

Vishuddhanand (intervening): Vyas says in a sutra that the creator of the world is a conscious. Intelligent Being and not inanimate, Where is the authority for this in the Vedas?

Dayanand: The Question is wholly irrelevant to the subject under debate, therefore it should not be considered here.

Vishuddhanand: If you know you must give reply to my question.

To avoid the debate becoming irrelevant to the subject under debate Swami Dayanand said that if one does not remember by heart he can only reply after seeing the book concerned.

Vishuddhanand (remarking sarcastically): Why have you dared to enter into open debate in Kashi if you do not know these books by heart?

Dayanand: Do you have memorized all these books by heart?

Vishuddhanand : Yes, we have.

Dayanand: Then let us know what is the nature of Dharma (religion)?

Vishuddhanand: Dharma is that action which is enjoyed in the Vedas with fruits thereof.

Dayanand: This sentence is your own composition and is of no authority. Give any quotation from the Vedas or Smirtis.

Vishuddhanand: There is a sutra of Jaimini that Dharm is that which being desirable, is indicated (or taught) by Vedic injunction.

Dayanand: But this is a sutra. Why do you not quote anything from the Vedas or Smritis from your memory, please? The word 'chodna' means persuasion, the persuasion too requires the authority of the Vedas or Smritis.

Swami Vishuddhanand thereupon became silent. There upon Swami Dayanand said "Well you could not tell the nature of Dharma, now please tell that how many elements of Dharma are there."

Vishuddhanand: There is only one element in the definition of Dharma.

Dayanand: Let us know that.

Vishuddhanand became silent again and said nothing in reply to that question.

Dayanand : There are ten ingredients is Manu's definition of Dharma according to Manu which are 1. Contentment, 2. Forgiveness, 3. Self control, 4. Abstaining from stealing, 5. (obedience to the rules of) Purification, 6. Coercion of the senses (organs), 7. Wisdom, 8. Knowledge (of the Supreme soul), 9. Truthfulness and 10. Abstention from anger. So how are you saying only one ?

Balshastri (intervening): We have seen all the scriptures.

Dayanand: If so please define Adharma (irreligion).

Balshastri remained silent and gave no reply. Thereupon many pandits cried out “Do the Vedas contain the word ‘pratima’ or not”.

Dayanand: Yes that word occurs in the Vedas.

Pandits: Quote it.

Dayanand: It is mentioned (in the Shadvinsh Brahmana of Samveda) that the pratima laughs and the temple trembles!

Pandits: But the word ‘pratima’ is in the Vedas too. Why do you cirticise it then?

Dayanand: The word, however, does not authorize the worship of stocks and stones. We should interpret the word correctly.

Pandits: What is the meaning of the Vedic hymn in which this word occurs?

Dayanand: The meaning is this – We now explain the wonderfully great peace. Saying this, the Brahmana of the Samveda gives the hymn commencing with Indra etc., three thousand offerings are to be made in fire after reciting each of those hymns. Thereafter, after Vyahriti (utterance of the three words Bhu, Bhuwa and Svah) five offerings in fire should be made. It is also laid down that after doing that the hymns of the Samveda should be sung in musical tones. The wonderful peace is enjoined by these steps; the hymn in which the word ‘pratima’ occurs does not relate to the region of death but to the region of Brahma. It is like this: The wonderful peace is described is in the eastern direction etc. The subject of the region

of death is closed after invoking peace of the southern direction, western direction and northern direction, the earth and the intermediate region or atmosphere. Thereafter peace of the region of salvation or the great emancipation or the region of Brahma is invoked. Hearing this, all the Pandits kept quiet.

Then Balshastri said “The wonderful seers attain peace over their impediments by invoking peace of the Devta of the direction concerned”.

Dayanand replied that “It was true but who points out the obstacles in this way is the question”?

Balshastri retorted “The senses point out the impediments.

Dayanand replied “The sense see themselves and not make others see anything. And what is the meaning of the word ‘sa’ in the hymns like ‘sa prachi dishmanvavarttate athetyatra’ etc. Balshastri thereupon said nothing and kept silence.

But Pandit Shivsahai said that “This hymn gives the fruits which flow from peace by going into intermediate and other regions.”

Thereupon Dayanand remarked ‘if you have seen that chapter please give the meaning of any hymn.’

Pt. Shiv sahai, however, became quiet and spoke nothing. Swami Vishuddhanand thereupon stepped forward and asked ‘who produced the Vedas?’

Dayanand: God produced the Vedas.

Balshastri: By which God? By the God of Nyaya Shastra, By the God of Yoga (Yoga Darshan) or by the God of Vedanta Shastra etc?

Dayanand: Are there more than one God?

Bal Shastri: God is only one. But what are the attributes of the God which produced the Vedas?

Dayanand: By the God whose attributes are Sat (self-existence), Chit (consciousness) and Anand (bliss).

Vishuddhanand: What is the relation between God and the Vedas? It is that of imparting and imparted or of begetter and begot or of inherence or of Master and servant or of essential identity?

Dayanand: The relation between God and the Vedas is that of cause and effect.

Vishuddhanand: As it said that one should worship God with the idea of Brahma in the mind and the idea of Brahma in the sun so should worship of idol (Shaligram) be adopted and followed.

Dayanand: It is said in the Vedas (Brahmanas which you hold) to be (Vedas) 'mano brahmetyupasit adityam brahmetyupasit' etc but there are no such texts as pashanadi brahmetyupasit' etc in them. How can then idol worship be said to be borne by any authority?

Thereupon Madhavacharya asked "What does the word 'Purt' in hymn 'udbudhyasvagne pratijagrihi tvamishtapurte sm srijethamyanch' mean.

Dayanand replied that it meant a well (Vapi or kup), a tank (tadag) and 'aram'.

Madhavacharya: Why does it not signify and include worship of idols of stone etc.?

Dayanand: The word 'Purt' signifies fulfillment (Purti). It can never mean worship of idols of stone etc., you may consult Nirukta and Brahman on the meaning of this hymn, if you have any doubts.

Madhavacharya: Is the word Purana in the Vedas or not?

Dayanand: The word Purana occurs in many places in the Vedas. But the word does not mean there, the books called Brahmavaivarta etc. Puranas, it refers to past and it is everywhere adjective of substance.

Vishuddhanand: There is this hymn in the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad -'etasya mahto bhutasya nihshvasitmetadrigvedo Yajurvedah Samvedo-atharva-angiras itihisah puranam shloka vyakhayananyanuvyathynanti.' Is all that it says authority?

Dayanand: Yes it is authority.

Vishudanand: If the Sholka (Verse) is authority, then all that it contains is authoritative.

Dayanand: It is true Shlokas only, that are authoritative. Not the others.

Vishuddhanand: What substance is qualified by the word Purana here?

Dayanand: We shall consider over it if you bring the book.

Madhavacharya took out two pages and asked that “what word is qualified by the word Purana here”?

Dayanand: Please read out the whole text.

Madhavacharya: ‘Brahmananitihasan Purananiti’ (Grihyasutra)

Dayanand: Here the word Purana is adjective of the word Brahmana and means that Brahmana are old i.e. Sanatana.

Balshastri: Are there any new Brahmanas too?

Dayanand: No, but in order that anyone may not have the least doubt about it, this qualifying word is used here.

Vishuddhanand: How can it be adjective in the face of the intervention or interposition of the word itihās (History).

Dayanand: Is there any such rule that there is no adjective in case of interpositions and adjective is used only when there are no interpositions in between, for see ‘Ajo nityah shashvato ayam purano na hanyate hanyamane Sharire.’ Does not the remote Dehi has an adjective here? And there is no contrary rule laid down in any grammar.

Vishuddhanand: The word ‘Purana’ is not adjective of the word Itihās. Does it follow that ‘Itihās’ should be taken to be new?

Dayanand: In other texts 'Purana' is used as adjective of 'Itihas' e.g. 'itihaspuranah panchamo vedanam vedah'.

Vamanacharya and others said that "this text does not appear in any of the Vedas".

Dayanand: If this is not found in the Vedas, I should be taken as defeated in this debate. But if it is found there, it shall follow that you are defeated. You should, all of you, give this undertaking in writing. Thereupon all the Pandits went silent.

Dayanand: Is there KalmSangya anywhere in Grammar?

Balshastri: No, Not, rather in commenting upon one sutra (aphorism) a commentator has ridiculed it.

Dayanand: Please give example of it and justify it by giving illustration.

Balshastri and others became silent on hearing this.

Madhavacharya took out two leafs and put them before the Pandits and said "In these leafs the Vedas lay down that on the tenth day after the termination of a Yajna, the host should hear the Puranas. What word does the word Purana qualify in these text? (Note: These were not pages of any of the four Vedas but were two leafs from Grihyasutras.)

Dayanand: Read out this text.

When no Pandit read it Bal Shastri took up the leafs and giving them in Dayanand's hands asked him to read them.

Dayanand: Please recite them yourself.

Balshastri: I cannot read them without spectacles and gave the pages again into Dayanand's hands.

Thereupon Swami Dayanand Began to ponder over the pages. He had hardly taken two minutes and was going to give this reply-

“The old Science is called ‘Purana Vidya’ and the old science of the Vedas is called Purana Vidya etc. This refers to Brahm Vidya (knowledge of Brahm, or God) for, in the previous context the hearing of the Rigveda and other three Vedas is enjoined. It is however no where said that there should be recital of the upanisads. Hence this reference must be taken to be of upanisads only and not of other books. The Science of the four Vedas alone is the old science of Brahm or God. This cannot mean Brahmavaivart and other new puranas. Had this text said Brahmvaivarta etc. eighteen puranas it would have been different. But there is no such text in the four Vedas. Hence this text does not refer to the eighteen puranas “

Dayanand had hardly given his aforesaid reply while Vishuddhanand got up in the middle and said, ‘I am getting late, I am going.’

Thereupon, all the pandits got up and went away shouting that ‘Dayanand got defeated’. But since the pandits could not give proof

from Vedas to answer the four questions put up by swami
Dananand, how can he be declared as defeated?

The End

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