

# Book Review on “Self-Development and Social Transformations?”

The vision and practice of the self-study mobilization of Swadhyaya

Ananta Kumar Giri (2008) Rawat Publications

Dr. Vandana Parmar

*Department of History, Shri S. K. Shah and Shri Krishna O. M. Arts College, Modasa, Gujarat – 383315, India*

The New Religious Movement is generally categorised as a spiritual organisation. This spiritual organisation is somehow related with the old religion with liberal framework. It denies to rigidity of old religion and have changes to cop up with modern life. Therefore, in contemporary time, the spiritual organisations have great influence on peoples' lives as it gives spiritual guidance. The charismatic leadership is one of the significant aspects of the new religious movement. In post-colonial India, many religious organisations and sects have had influence on Indian society. Swadhyaya Parivar can be considered as one of the inflective spiritual organisations that influence on people which aims at social harmony and brotherhood. Ananta Kumar Giri has analysed the philosophy, activities and practice of Swadhyaya in the context of self-development and transformation.

Though the Swadhyaya movement was begun in Gujarat, Giri has analysed Swadhyaya through his filed work intwenty villages of Sabarkantha region (Gujarat). Swadhyaya has large number of following in the western states of India i.e. Gujarat and Maharashtra. The founder of *Swadhyaya Parivar* (SP) or *Swadhyaya Movement* (SM) was Pandurag Vaujanath Athavale. The followers of Athavale had started bhaktiferi (devotional travel) in the villages of Gujarat and the movement had begun.

During seventies, he invented prayogas (experiments) like *Amrutalayam*, *Yogeshwar Krishi*, *Shridarshanam*, *Matsyagandha* and so on. Swadhyaya philosophy's focus is on *Bhakti* and Gita's *Karmayoga*. Swadhyaya also talks about panchrangkranti (five-colour revolution) i.e. economic, political, social, emotional and spiritual revolution.

Swadhyaya was begun in Simar village(coastal town of Veraval in Junaghath district) with the Bhaktiferi (devotional travel) of Swadhyayees who came from Bombay (around 1972). Kendra (centre) has great importance in Swadhyaya because most of the activities are conducted in the particular place i.e. Kendra. Here, author describes the work of different Kendrsin Simar viz. 'Sherikendra (neighbourhood centre), BalSanskar Kendra (centre for imparting culture to

children), Yuvakendra (centre for the youth), Mahila Kendra (centre for women), Manahar Kendra (centre for the old people), Video Kendra' (Giri, 2008: 50-58). Furthermore, author explains about other activities and prayogas (experiments) of Swadhyaya like *Amrutalayam*, *Yogeshwar Krishi*, *Ekadashi*, *Vriksh Mandir* and so on. *Amrutalayam* is the important institution of SP. It is like a lush green house of God and an important place to celebrate festivals. Simar has *Amrutalayam*. Another experiment is *Vriksh Mandir* i.e. tree temple (chapter two).

The third chapter also elaborates Swadhyaya, activities and its experience in different villages like Vidia, Kharwawad, Una and Untwala. Kharwawad has 58 sherikendras and a *Matsyagandha*. Una can be considered as the laboratory of prayogas (experiments) of Swadhyaya(page, 150). Thereafter, author explains Kandhi *Shridarshanam*. *Shridarshanam* is a good experiment for creating co-ordination between twenty villages. Another *prayogas* are Goras and Parivar store. Goras relates with milk selling. It is a socio-economic *pragog* of Swadhyaya. "Those who have milk bring it to Goras and then it is sold at a margin of one rupee" (page, 185). *Parivar store* and *Phatkada store* are places where Swadhyayees learn to do business in a spiritual way.

The fourth chapter is about Swadhyaya and its activities in tribal areas of Gujarat. Two noticeable prayogas are *GharMandir* and *Patanjali Chikitsalaya*. *Ghar Mandiris* a prayer house cum temple like *Amrutalayam*. *Ghar Mandir* is a unique experiment in tribal area. This house temple is not stable. *GharMandir* consists Swadhyaya trinity's photograph (Yogeshwara, Parvati with child Ganesha and Lord Shiva) and dadaji (Pandurag Shastri). It moves from one house to another house. One house can be host for one week (Giri, 2008: 204-205). *Patanjali Chikitsalaya* is a kind of hospital where swadhyayee doctors give medicines and treatments in tribal areas. Doctors do also *bhavferi* during their visit and for them this is god's work.

As Swadhyaya is related with self-study, emphasis on education and learning becomes imperative in the process of self-development and transformation. Dada's *pravachanas* (discourse) and functioning of Kendrs relate with education.

Here, education and learning does mean of spiritual education and learning lessons from Vedas, Gita, Upanisads and other moral values. Swadhyaya has Tatwagyan Vidhyapeeth. It is a centre of educational experiments. It gives education on Indian culture and philosophy. According to students, they have come here merely not for book learning but for experience of studying in Tapovan. Sixth chapter describes Swadhyaya's work and activities on international level (chapter fifth).

The seventh chapter is important in terms of raising issues and challenges of Swadhyaya. For example, Pandurang Athavale's choice of next leader (Jayshreedidi- his adopted daughter) and that lead internal conflict and struggle among swadhyayees. Another issue is the use of property and wealth of Swadhyaya Parivar and Didi's aggressive leadership. Swadhyaya had provided relief to the victims of earthquake of 2001. However, it was silent in the critical period of communal riots of 2002.

Swadhyaya has given new names to deprived section of society. It calls *Bhavaluxis* (store houses of emotion) to Dalits and *Sagarputra* (son of ocean) to fishermen. According to author, in Swadhyaya needs two-way process i.e. Dalits can

learn habits of education from Brahmins and Brahmins can learn value of labour from Dalits. Pandurang Athavale's emphasis on the old tradition and its glorification crates problem. As author quoted him, "if we want Vedic culture to survive, we have to maintain the age-old traditions. To this end, the Upanisadas are absolutely necessary. But above all we want Manu and the social life envisaged by him. Let Manu come first and then the Upanisadas" (page, 13). However, for author, Swadhyaya's vision and practice of *sharmbhakti* (devotional labour) has transcended this categorisation and it relates with one's self-realisation and development of ones.

The book's focus is on Swadhyaya's contribution in self-development and its role in social transformation. According to author, Self-development means developing capacity of ones to tackle the critical situation. However, to become aware of rights and struggle to acquire it, is imperative for one's development. When one talks about social change and transformation, the existing power relation, discrimination, and inequality should be challenged, however, Swadhyaya does not challenge class and caste structure of Indian society. Here, author's acceptance of unquestionable role and vision of Swadhyaya on societal system seems problematic.