

SWADHYAYA EFFORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT¹

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The simplicity and truth of the central message of *Swadhyaya* is that there is something good and noble in each of us waiting to be awakened and that by recognising these within ourselves and in others, we raise our relationships to a higher plane, creating a more wholesome society. In a sense, such recognition is also central to building partnerships. Dadaji, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, has distilled the ancient wisdom of our tradition and used its essence to refurbish man's selfhood. He inspired instrumental devotion or *kruti Bhakti* based on *Swa-adhyaya* (self-study) by which common man is empowered to create a better society and social institutions.

Pandurang Shastri Athavale received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1996 and the Templeton Award in 1997. He said in his Templeton Prize address, "It is my experience that awareness of nearness of God and reverence for that power creates reverence for self, reverence for others, reverence for nature and reverence for entire creation". This reverential attitude, invoked in large numbers, is underlying the motivation that brought in sustained collective action resulting in creation of impersonal wealth.

Beginning in 1958, Athavale established dozens of programmes which have God as the source of their inspiration, including:

- ♦ *Bhaktipheri* (goodwill visits) by thousands of followers among approximately 2,20,000 of them throughout India and extending to the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Portugal, Kenya, South Africa, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Fiji, West Indies and Surinam.
- ♦ *Amruthalayam* (village temples) built by the joint efforts of the villagers where persons of all creeds, castes and economic status meet to worship in unity and discuss ways to improve village life – 104 of them are existing.
- ♦ *Yogeswar Krushi* (farms devoted to God) where the devotees from the village give a few days of labour each in a year as a concrete expression of their devotion to God. Produce is offered to the needy as *prasaad* (part-taking of offering to God and thus sanctified) - 3,396 such farms are established in as many villages.
- ♦ *Matsyagandhas* (floating temples of God), fishing boats built by fishermen and women in the villages. Fishermen operate these boats voluntarily a few days each in a year as expression of devotion to God. Again, harvest is shared by the needy as *prasaad* – 71 such fishing boats are in operation.
- ♦ *Vrikshmandirs* (orchards of God) which are raised by *Swadhyayees* (devoted followers) by each of them offering a few days of voluntary labour in a year - 16 orchards are established.
- ♦ 21,300 *Behna Kendras* where women devotees meet to discuss and help one another to solve their problems are working.
- ♦ 11,200 *Bal Samskar Kendras* where children get socialised

through curricular and extra-curricular activities are functioning.

- ♦ 15,400 Divine Brain Trusts where young people meet every week once to discuss and exchange thoughts are existing.
- ♦ 474 *Nirmal Neer* (Pure water tanks – may or may not be for irrigation) tanks either mostly deepened or rarely created by devotees from a cluster of villages for a period of ten days in a year successively for many years.

Most development efforts begin their day by assuming that man is guided in the conduct of life by "bounded rationality" and "opportunism bordering on guile" and play around with designs of institutions. But the model of man remains a "human being propelled by self interest". These efforts seem fruitless, especially

Swadhyaya movement puts people at the core of development and had God as the source of their inspiration.

when the goal is to build institutions that put people at the core of their agenda. *Swadhyaya* movement has overcome this limitation by starting with the model of man itself and by giving the individual a new self-hood. By enabling the man to discover the good and the

noble residing in self and others, by inspiring moderation over excess and aggression, by teaching the value of transcending ego but protecting one's honour and dignity at all cost, and by transmuting devotion into self-less but socially purposive action, the movement has created a personal and social identity of the individual which challenges stereotyped models of man.

The powerful social force that so unleashed has begun to produce spontaneous emergence of a variety of people's institutions, needing no coaxing, no orchestration, no promotion and all using self-propelled local initiative and internally generated resources. In a world where common property institutions – including the family – are falling apart, there is small groundswell of initiatives by ordinary farmers, fishermen and artisans to create common property institutions by offering their "respective efficiencies" to God and His creation.

Paradigm relevant to the Indian context

Social and economic issues cannot be separated from political and religious concerns as many modern planners and thinkers seem to assume. The current global economic system and its associated development paradigm are often at odds with traditional knowledge that is holistic encompassing both logical/empirical and normative/affective. The ethical and the spiritual concerns are central values in many developing countries, especially among the rural community. Unless these values are rediscovered, development, in the real sense, will elude us (Chowdhry, 1996, 1997).

There are many indigenous movements (like the Ramakrishna Mission, the *Swadhyaya* Movement, the Bahai's, disciples of Sri Aurobindo in Pondichery) built on the sacred, spiritual and moral aspects (normative/affective considerations and identity) - but

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not necessarily religious. These, in general, ignore or deliberately discourage participation based on rational considerations of self-interest and encourage collective spirit through enlargement of individual identity beyond personal.

A report about *Swadhyaya's* activities and achievements (Outlook, April 3, 1995) states: "In some 80000 villages where it holds sway, *Swadhyaya* has used the notion of human dignity and devotion as a creative force to generate vast amounts of impersonal wealth among farmers and fisher folk; promoted afforestation and gender equality; demolished caste barriers and put an end to drinking (alcoholism) and wife beating". In addition, the engineers and technicians in the movement have helped to harvest rainwater to recharge 94465 wells (mostly private) and 208 dry lakes (common ponds). All this is achieved with the help of the people.

India is rich in such institutions serving economic, social and ecological needs. These institutions are rooted in the spiritual and sacred values based on normative/affective considerations as well as in the local traditions of community sharing and control which are largely an outcome of concretising such normative/affective considerations and not logical/empirical considerations. They have not motivated the individuals by appealing to their individual-rational considerations (the domain of neoclassical paradigm) but by activating their collectivistic normative, affective considerations (the domain of deontological ethic paradigm) through transformation of identity (Etzioni, 1988). These efforts succeeded on a sufficiently large scale to warrant our attention for further understanding. Many of these efforts are structured around avoiding and reversing of the trends in over use of natural resources and around using the same in a sustainable manner by modifying value orientation of individuals.

In 'The Theory of Moral Sentiments,' Adam Smith, himself, observed that people act out of a conscience and are related to one another not merely via a market - in exchange relations, trying to maximise their interest; but also as people whose psychic well-being is deeply dependent on the approval of others, which in turn is based on acting morally, and not on enhancing wealth. "How so ever selfish man be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him" (Smith, [1759] 1976).

In short, people typically do not make rational decisions all the time. Sometimes, they do act relatively more rationally and we are able to identify the conditions and forces that promote such higher levels of rationality. In other times, we find that people significantly drawing on emotions arising out of value judgements or ideology which largely define their identity for them. This is, often, an effective, not a distorted, way of making choices and taking decisions. People appear to be striving towards balancing multiple considerations rather than maximise or minimise any one of them. Some considerations are predominant in a particular situation falling in the domain of a specific set of considerations but others do not get negated completely.

Shamir mentions calculative considerations, moral commitments and the affirmation of identities as sources of collectivistic work

motivation. It is argued that perceived collective efficacy and social rewards and sanctions should be given a central place in models of collectivistic work motivation. It is further argued that moral commitments and identity affirmation can not be reduced to calculative considerations and doing so masks the potential importance of these factors in explanation of collective action (Shamir, 1990).

There is a traditional Hindu theory that explains why a particular action does or does not take place. There are three prerequisites: motivation (*Ichha* or strong desire) leading towards search for knowledge (*Jnana* or know-how) and application skill (*Kriya* or creative ability) finally culminating in action resulting in fulfillment (Ranganadhananda, 1977). Inadequacy in any of these three can lead to either inaction or action not culminating in fulfillment. It is quite possible to check the adequacy or inadequacy of these in individuals or groups by suitably developed instruments before deciding on what should be the thrust of outside intervention in terms of motivational education or transfer of technology (know-how) or resource supplementing (provisioning).

Swadhyaya has used the notion of human dignity and devotion as a creative force to generate a desire leading to knowledge and finally action by individuals in communities.

Mahesh looked at the Eastern (largely Hindu and Chinese) and Western theories on motivation and proposed an integrated model of human motivation (Mahesh, 1993). Sharma explains human motivation based on traditional Hindu ideas and advocates a

holistic model of inspirational motivation (Sharma, 1996). An individual must have a reasonably comfortable self-attitude vis-a-vis others in terms of four life positions advocated by transactional analysts like Eric Berne and a world-view starting with immediate and proximate contextual reality which in turn influences the perception of one's goal, role and identity (Erikson, 1963; Sudhir Kakkar, 1968).

Attitude towards natural resources

Attitudes and beliefs associated with the use of natural resources like land, water, trees, animals and other human beings can be meaningfully classified as

- Extractive - beyond the rate at which nature replenishes them,
- Balancing - restricting the use moderately to be within recognised limits of replenishment,
- Conservative - accepting some responsibility for supplementing the natural processes of replenishment.

Underlying these attitudes and beliefs is the understanding of nature and its processes as

- Abundant and to be used for the unrestrained enjoyment of man,
- Limited and interdependent marked by continuous reciprocal exchange, and
- Purposive, where man needs to align his entire existence to become a willing and fit instrument.

Swadhyaya efforts mould these attitudes to self and nature by transforming the worldview of individuals with the idea of God being immanent in the universe. By doing so, *Swadhyaya* brings improvements in both social and ecological environment. Today's problems of pollution and depletion of natural resources and

growing violence and decreased goodwill towards others in the social spheres perhaps can only be adequately addressed by living with a philosophy that embraces both with an all inclusive reverential attitude in place of antagonistic feelings towards both of them.

Threshold level of coordinated efforts

As a particular person's action and its impacts, which are often diffused over a long period of time and space, and are very minute compared with the totality, it is difficult to visualise the reciprocal consequences clearly. Once the reciprocal balances are disturbed beyond the limits within which they can be re-established, the consequential changes manifest. Often the threshold limits of effort required for restoration of disturbed cycles or establishing new cycles are much larger and beyond the scope of a few individuals. This calls forth for sustained, co-ordinated "collective" effort on a scale that matches the requirement to restore or establish balance.

Swadhyaya has achieved this difficult matching in several noteworthy long-term efforts like in establishing *Yogeswar krishi* farms (where farmers offer *kruthiBhakti*), *Vrikshamandirs* (where *kruthiBhakti* is directed towards raising orchards) and *Sridarshanam* farms (where farmers from about 20 villages offer *kruthiBhakti*). The self-organisation of *Swadhyayees* in totally self-reliant ways in mobilising material requirements and human efforts with requisite skills is highly commendable. This is evident in both short-duration as well as long-duration programmes initiated by *Swadhyaya*.

Attitude towards self and others

In order to make the collective effort fruitful, the individuals must work in an orderly manner with discipline. Often, collective effort requires suspending of short term calculative considerations of the individuals. This in turn requires a reasonable degree of trust in others. The requisite attitude towards self and others is characterised by I AM OK - YOU ARE OK. Unless an individual graduates this psychological position, he would not be able to make effective contributions to the collective effort. In all other psychological positions - characterised by I AM NOT OK - YOU ARE OK, I AM NOT OK - YOU ARE NOT OK, I AM OK - YOU ARE NOT OK, - there are barriers to make effective contributions to collective efforts (James and Dorothy 1978). This preparation of the individual for collective work involves transformation of WORLDVIEW; affecting shifts in VALUES accompanied by an expansive Self-identity and includes psychological self-transformation processes. In the process, individuals often acquire and maintain a new sense of identity characterised by observable sets of actions, words and behaviour as reflected in relations with the rest.

While attitudes towards self and the other influence the inter personal relationships, attitudes towards other groups - be they of another family, caste, ideology, language etc., affect the transactions with them as groups. Either to take part in the group efforts or abstain from them gets deeply influenced by how the

group is perceived. At stake in participation in-group efforts is a perceived challenge to one's Worldview, Values and Identity. Some of these may get reinforced and validated, while some get questioned and invalidated. So participation offers a mix of positive-negative experience. The degree of comfort one has with the self-concept and the positive feeling towards the group influence the degree of participation.

Non-threatening environment at least in the initial stages, gives the individual some assurance and possibly prompts them to exploratory participation. If one gets convinced of the desirability of such metamorphosis, one continues the participation. Most of the above processes simultaneously and continuously occur in the context that an individual finds him. Worldview, values and Identity do not remain static and evolve as a complex product of interaction of the individual with the rest.

Swadhyaya movement has adopted persuasive methods - without a trace of coercion - to propagate their message and induce new persons to join their efforts. NO TARGETS to achieve or complete except the self-imposed ones offer a pressure free atmosphere to exercise one's own volition. Free entry and free exit offers complete freedom and promotes self-responsibility to honour the commitments once made. Non-hierarchical functional structure promotes the spirit of brotherhood.

Regular interactions

The physical arrangements for living in space, while offering scope for certain modes of interaction making it "easy" for their occurrence, also curtail scope for certain modes of interaction making it "difficult" for their occurrence. Repeated nature of certain modes of interactions (intensity - volume as well as emotional quality) encourages formation of "habitual" ways of behaviour. This is how we observe different modes of greeting, ways of dressing, gestures, arrangements of living space, modes of keeping surroundings, attitude towards cleanliness, and use of resources. *Swadhyaya Parivar* has developed its own distinct ways related to all these.

Some patterns of living seem to inhibit opportunities, in several ways, for interaction with others. Isolation and sense of being alienated seem to be a feature of most of our lives. Modern day living offers much less scope for the requisite intensity of interaction. This is a very serious limitation in the development of proper World view, in the evolution proper of Values and in achieving and affirming a proper self-identity. We have observed remarkable differences especially in children who often grow in relative isolation vis-à-vis children in densely packed environments. Significant differences exist among women and men as well.

Swadhyaya has incorporated many traditional ideas like "*trikal sandhya*" and revives their use as reinforcing routines in self-transformation processes. Opportunities created to meet and interact on regular basis helps the individuals to transcend their limited identities. Almost all the meetings have a pre-designed agenda and careful thought out "routines" of actions, words and behaviour to reinforce the messages of divine brotherhood of all

beings, the immanence of God in the creation, and the sacred nature of everything. The proof of acceptance of these ideas is to be provided by selfless participation in an array of socially purposeful action. This is what is meant by recognition of *Bhakti* (devoted selfless action) as a social force.

Bhav pheri, during which an individual is encouraged to explain the ideology to others, is used as a powerful means to help internalisation of ideas. In order to explain others one needs to achieve clarity of thoughts, articulate them coherently, and perhaps become a model by exemplifying them in personal conduct over a period of time. *Bhakti pheri* is when an individual gets an opportunity to practice them and offers as a model. This is a very powerful incentive leading to establishment of an identity labelled as *Swadhyayee*. One of the chief ways in which *Swadhyaya* movement influences its adherents is by engaging them in these dialogical processes which are akin to those involved in conscientisation process mentioned by Freire (1972, 1974, 1978).

Bhakti as social force

For example, a reverential attitude towards self and others made people from several villages accept and implement "soak-pit" programme making the streets free of overflowing gutter waters. There may be many practical results, such as less of mosquito menace etc., of this activity accepted by almost all the villagers including those who are not part of *Swadhyaya parivar*. But those are not the "prime motivations" but consequential to the action motivated by Values and affirmation of identity. The way in which this was achieved through careful mobilisation for collective action and the processes used in allocation of work achieved far more than the physical task of "soak-pits" construction. Promoting a sense of brotherhood, showing concern for others, overcoming antagonistic feelings towards others etc., were a few among the multiple outcomes that improved the immediate social environment apart from the physical.

Nirmal Neer pond construction is projected as an opportunity of thanksgiving (offering of your efficiencies), getting together of people from different villages that is marked by social gaiety of singing, self-less and friendly working together for a purpose without expecting any returns. This careful crafting of "socially purposeful" activities as opportunities for individuals to express the "value" they confer on "ideals" by participating in action without expecting any benefits for themselves offers them a challenging experience. *Swadhyaya* uses the traditional ideas of "*Bhakti*" (devotion) but imbues devoted actions with a new and radical interpretation as "socially purposeful" actions without selfish motivation.

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The Banaskantha District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Ltd., Palanpur has been awarded the Certification under the International Quality and Safety Mark IS/ISO 9002-1994 and IS 15000:1998 - HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points). They have been granted the final certification by the Indian Authorised Auditors M/s. Bureau of Indian Standards, the Government of India undertaking. The Banas Dairy has joined the select few in the food industry and are perhaps the second co-operative dairy in the Country and the first Dairy Co-operative in the State to be accredited as ISO & HACCP integrated system certification. This is the result of their continuous endeavour to thrive for Quality Integrity and Consumer Safety.

IRMA commends the Chairman, Managing Director, Banas Dairy for their initiative and leadership to make the Dairy awardworthy. Congratulation to the staff and members of co-operative for making it a quality dairy.

The Managing Director, Shri Sangram Singh Chaudhary is an IRMA alumnus (PRM 1984-86).