

'Reckon with the hidden factor'

HIS ITINERARY reads like that of a business magnate. But he is not one. The mammoth audience at his programmes would deceive a bystander into believing that a pop star is performing. Yet he is far removed from that. He is as he describes himself — a traditional teacher of Brahma Vidya. He is Dayananda Saraswati — ascetic, philosopher and teacher. His birthday falls on August 15. In this interview with Lakshmi Devnath, he talks about God, religion, rituals and spirituality:

Is the concept of God just one of faith?

Well, if you say that everything here is God then He is not one of faith but one to be understood. He is both the maker and material. Viewed from this angle, for us God is not a mere belief. He is a reality. Every thinking individual at one time or the other ponders on the question — Who am I? This is only a different way of asking — Who or what is God? To understand God is to understand the atma (the self). What is your position in the world? To understand your place in the scheme of things you first need to understand the scheme.

Can you comment on the practicality of religion?

If you realise that all that is here is God there is no question of impracticality. There is a hidden variable in every effort and this includes even mundane activities like making bread. Now, in life, one has to constantly reckon with this hidden factor. You cannot control it because it is hidden. Practical people try to deal with this factor through prayer.

The very word 'prayer' means a religious appeal to control the hidden variable. In fact, I would describe prayer as the effort of a practical person.

Are ethics and morality inter-related to religion? An ethical life need not necessarily be a religious one. Bertrand Russell championed the cause of various issues like nuclear non-proliferation and so on.

But he was not a religious person. In fact, he wrote a book — 'Why I am not a Christian?' it is one that has to be read by everybody. I would stress that



Swami Dayananda Saraswati ... ascetic, philosopher and teacher.

everybody has to be ethical.

What is the significance of rituals?

One should not undermine the importance of rituals. It is an individual's attempt to relate to the Lord. Rituals are emotions given a physical form. It is a form of prayer. Prayer can be classified into three types (a) kaayikam — by physical actions (b) vaachikam — of the form of words (c) maanasam — of the mind. Each form has its significance. Prayer is karma (action) and karma produces results. By

that logic different forms of prayer give rise to different results. They (the elders) may not be able to explain the reasons behind the rituals but they are all relevant.

Is a study of philosophical books necessary for spiritual evolution?

We need to study and study properly. And then you realise there is so much to know. Every human being has the basic problem of being dissatisfied with what he/she is i.e. self-non-acceptance. We are the on-

ly species of life that is given the prerogative to evolve. We have to move from erroneous knowledge to knowledge. To that end, study of right books and satsangh (good company) help.

While on the one hand there does seem to be a revival of religion and spirituality — a case in point is the massive attendance at your lectures — on the other hand society continues to be strife ridden.

People who come to discourses are all those who are struggling to understand (the

riddle of life). If you look at the past, you realise that it has always been a struggle to conform to Dharma. We are passing through a phase where I perceive a condition that needs to change and at the same time a trend towards change. In a boiling pot some grains get cooked early and some later. But they are all in the process.

What is the goal of human life?

Discovery of the Self. In fact no self-judging human being will rest content unless he or

she discovers the self. That is 100 per cent acceptance of oneself.

What is the value of Vedic education and the Sanskrit language?

Vedic heritage is a legacy we have inherited. A heritage is something you imbibe over generations down. Research has proven that it is important for a human child to be aware of its roots. We must be proud of our heritage, our ancestry and if that has meaning too then it is actually a privilege. Define a typical Hindu home and you have explained Vedic heritage.

The UNESCO has declared that Vedic recitation is the most ancient and they have also declared it human heritage. We are preserving monuments, fossils, old skeletons and so on. We say with pride — here is a million year old bone.

Shouldn't we preserve something that is profound, ancient and alive? The UNESCO has also declared Sanskrit as the most ancient of languages. It is a highly analysed language. It is the language of the Vedas. It is the key to a whole treasure-house of knowledge.

You have been quite vociferous against conversion...

Even political boundaries of countries are accepted as they are. The world is engaged in preserving cultures. When there is such an acceptance, I want acceptance of religious traditions too. Today there is a blatant destruction of ancient cultures with increasing money power. I feel it is humanity's duty to stop this crime.

What is your message for today's youth?

The youth of India should discover India. India is not to be taken for granted. Youngsters should discover India not by travelling but by understanding (its culture).

Why does one have a puja room? Why should one not step on a book or currency note? Why does a woman wear gold? In several respects we are unique — our temples, sculptures, inscriptions, our Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. The youth need to discover their roots, trunks, branches, flowers et al.