



## Research Paper

# George Santayana: The Aristocratic & Philosophical Aloofness

Prof. Dr. Amreen Fatima Shaikh<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. G.N.Sharma\*

<sup>1</sup>Shubham Institute, Aurangabad-431001, INDIA.

\*Institute of Career Development, Aurangabad-431001, INDIA

(\*Corresponding Author)

### ABSTRACT

All idealists voluntarily suffer and therefore, there is hardly any room for them to complain about the world they live in. However, they have a wistful longing which expects the world to be tuned to their way of thinking! There is a continual frustration in their youthful years but fortunately a hope that kindles for the future keeps them lively. George Santayana somehow imbibed neither the Spanish nor the American culture totally. Generally this happens when one is born in one country and brought up in another. We have to accept the fact that sensitive souls rejoice living in past with select nostalgic memories and intentionally prefer to stretch on the dint of the speculating power within, sometimes beyond the stretchable limits. At times this volition does pay but might also result into a unique philosophical outlook comprising numerous components of varied nature. George Santayana happily nurtured the influences stemming out of the ancient Greek culture and of course the philosophy thereof. Being an accustomed global trotter he had developed an implicit faith in certain fancy novel ideas which indeed helped him later to go outrightly for taking on abstract ideas. He was definitely conscious of the fact that the path which he had opted was not at all a smooth one and initially he found everything sketchy. Exerting tirelessly and later enduring the demands of the situation, had become a routine practice for him. In the course of life he had developed the habit of trying to grasp and then guide the modern world on the basis of the past recognised theories giving absolutely no scope for even a minor deviation. This habit lasted throughout his life. Being a staid personality, he had no regrets but that many times improvised his personality in such a queer way that aloofness automatically became the major shade of his persona.

Doubting the efficacy of the religious principles particularly when applied in the mart of the worldly affairs, may be viewed as a common human temperament when young. This would obviously lead to Atheism. However, with experience one may not find the chosen route totally satisfying either. Therefore, when a philosopher like George Santayana approaches or tries to infer the routine activities of the society he would have faced many contradictory shades within. This paper attempts to bring forth only such important outlooks and their influence on his philosophy.

**KEYWORDS:** Ancient Greek Culture, Philosophical Outlook, Aristocratic Analysis.

Received 05 November, 2020; Accepted 18 November, 2020 © The author(s) 2020.

Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

## I. INTRODUCTION

The early Greek philosophers consciously exerted to explore with an intention to discover a single controlling element or entity, which could reveal the secret functioning of Nature. However, one has to accept the fact that they did not agree with each other regarding the individual and ultimate claims. The truth can now be summed up by declaring that all of them were faultless in their own way and they definitely contributed to the subject. With experience and empirical findings we realize that their efforts were unidirectional and the routes were different. From Socrates onwards particularly with Plato, Aristotle and a few more we find the philosophical explorations turning more inwards in connection with human nature and its problems or destiny. Further, every philosopher with the lineage continued either by getting attested to a specific school or presenting an improvised format of the same with minor suggestions.

George Santayana had fancy ideas much owing to the childhood memories which had erected his mentality in a concrete form. He continued with the same bookish ideas expecting the world to be on that rigid path only. At an early age his mother took him to America after divorcing her second husband. He had made it a habit to get engrossed into his lasting passion of reading and prolific writing right from the childhood itself.

There was a little but not a very marked change in his withdrawn nature due to which he had to create his own world which provided a sort of psychological security and in turn developed the genre of the Aristocratic aloofness and disposition. As he advanced in life he nurtured strong likes and dislikes because of which he had a clarity of thought and a fixed pathway for realizing the intricacies of life. He was never alone because he had with him the childhood dreams which he never purposefully edited but always felt an urgency for fulfilling them in the modern world, which according to him had dissipated ideas. Being habituated to cover self with security of all types he did not relish the company of men and therefore preferred women to men! He had a soft corner for women and no distrust as such with men but somehow was inclined to feel a little uneasy in their company. He had formed prejudices against men much because of his own lofty expectations and therefore found their company almost disapproving. This further grew to such an extent that he could not force self to agree with their thinking, particularly their philosophical ideas that seemed to him absolutely crazy and totally grown out of the idealistic conception of the world. Santayana always insisted upon accepting the world as it is such that it carries no academic burden. Other way around he rather claimed that the correct knowledge would be only that which comes through our experience and by making an impartial scrutiny of the world. May be due to this he was stamped as a pure "Naturalist" or a materialist with no inclination towards the other recognised behavioural sciences. This had furthermore got extended into the domain of Atheism. Probably it culminated from the urge to find truth and also Agnostic nature. Most of his temperament was obviously shaped by his parents' outgoing nature. In brief his nature could be understood from the description given below.

'He was a product of his father's as well as his mother's "irreligious religion." His parents had regarded all religion "as a work of human imagination." They had believed that "sacrifices, prayers, churches and tales of immortality were invented by rascally priests in order to dominate the foolish." To this belief Santayana subscribed fully...Santayana through his mind was the mind of a sceptic, his heart was the heart of a believer. "My sympathies" he writes, "were entirely with those other members of my family who were devout believers." To be sure, "Religions are the fairy tales of the conscience."<sup>1</sup>

## II. PHILOSOPHICAL EXCURSIONS

Many times it so happens with serious minded or finicky thinkers that after gallivanting or even merely advancing in life, there is a temptation to look back and check if anything was left out inadvertently for academic corrections. Santayana though marched confidently with atheistic outlook yet the poet in him did not remain mellowed down. Thinking of the early philosophers particularly from Plato's era and painting a world as worthy of living, had become a customary habit. He indeed missed that world which though in imagination soothed his feelings. Therefore there were pragmatic reflections in his speech and writings too, sometimes laced with lamentations, sadness, digging the past etc. At times he would regret having been born in an era not suitable to his temperament or mood swings. This might have brought in a little nostalgic feeling and unexpressed frustration. A streak of melancholic nature did continue but in the private quarters only. There are references showing Santayana's poet-philosopher's temperament due to which he would never hurriedly place his views. A steady speech could go on and would not bother for a longish pause just for the sake of a befitting word or even a phrase. He was quite critical about the "false idols" set by the mass and left unchecked or was never reviewed in the then present context. Therefore it was said, "Santayana's philosophical work is a strange mixture of Platonism, Atheism and Catholicism. First of all he believes, like Plato, in a world of ideas. Santayana calls them essences. The essence of Santayana, like the idea of Plato, is the form of everything that is, that ever was, that ever will be-and Santayana would add that never will be."<sup>2</sup>

Santayana's philosophical findings show an extension of the existence of matter such that to him even mind can have similar characteristics or attributes. With this assumption human mind may also be considered as an organ or entity ever subjected to the ageing process. Ultimately it is also like our body and so undergoes various phases or stages before submitting to the adverse forces. With this kind of mentality Santayana proceeded more with convictions which were quite suitable to a rational mind, rather qualifying to the scientific temperament. It could be now said that it was also the need of the time. He was very confident of his atheistic beliefs. Therefore, he went on to announce firmly that everything is compulsorily subjected to the ageing process without exception and with this it would seem a big folly when something is claimed to be immortal. All the movement within and outside us is merely the result of energy and its transformations or changing forms. One may refer to the term 'Spirit' in this context. Well, for Santayana everything stems out of the interconvertibility between the varied forms of energy and so the result is what we call actions in varied areas. This sounds to be something very uncommon thinking or strange to most of the readers. In fact this is the base of the law of conservation of energy or we may consider both mass and energy. A mechanistic picture was presented by him. He even went to the extent of describing mind as a part of the body movement or mechanism. In a nutshell, everything in his philosophy is reduced to a Machine. To him Mind can only send the signals of approval or disapproval. Just as in Physics most of the scientists had been struggling to invent a "Theory of everything", in Philosophy too, we find efforts had been directed to arrive at a particular way of thinking, which

could sort out all our problems. In Physics we consider Gravitational and Electromagnetic forces which function on the basis of their intensity in keeping the atoms together or fail to do so, to explain all phenomena. Neither in Physics nor in Philosophy, humanity could find any such Omnipotent entity to clarify all doubts. In this context, Santayana turns to Atheism and openly condemns all those theories which had suggested to entrust everything to Religion. It is, according to him, difficult to accept the existence and further the role of God in a world of uncontrolled activities. It is actually abhorrible to consider the very idea of God that has emerged from a myth i.e. Religion and as an extension the fictitious hero God-whose description in no way tallies with the existing reality in a world filled with strife and tragedies. But then Santayana's Atheism does not seem to be restricted, in the sense, discerning the very idea of 'God' altogether. He believes the existence but in the realm of poetry. Therefore, although there is condemnation initially, there is a sort of recovery and deliberate presentation of the same in a new form. One can compare this attitude with Immanuel Kant's Critiques wherein in a rare philosophical trilogy is developed by initial rejection, later a progressive reconsideration from pragmatic viewpoint and ultimately confirming God but in an area which is absolutely different from the conventional ones.

### **III. ALOOFNESS**

When any philosopher by choice gets into the arena of existential or stoic way for leading life, he becomes both sensitive and serious. The former temperament easily gets affected by the wayward existing social order while the latter brings in disappointments in private life. It even becomes difficult to sustain any behavioural science, as a guiding principle for living, howsoever popular or supported by earlier philosophers. In this context there are numerous examples to quote but more obvious one is related to Friedrich Nietzsche who was a victim of loneliness to such an extent that he could hardly withstand the general social order which was slowly getting intellectually drained off. Therefore, being philosophically oriented does not necessarily promise a comfort zone in life and that too all the while. Adjusting with the people around us who are least intellectual is definitely an art in itself; failing which social loneliness is bound to creep in steadily to cause a total disaster. In such a scenario George Santayana had to struggle a lot for getting properly tuned with the society.

In order to pacify the various recognised interlocking moods of human beings, probably Agathism was practised by the majority in society because that encourages no denial of Gods of mythology and legends. Human personality as such is pretty weak and therefore always needs a psychological support, particularly phasewise with the ageing process. Therefore everything is entrusted to the unseen force, referring to it "God" and wantonly pursuing the disbelief in the existence of eternal Universe distinct from God. Will Durant in 'The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Time' aptly refers to George Santayana to clarify the scenario in the previous century. "But which of us is original except in form? What idea can we conceive today that has not enjoyed, in one garb or another, a hoary antiquity of time? It is easier to be original in error than in truth, for every truth displaces a thousand falsehoods. An honest philosopher will admit, like Santayana, that truth, in its outlines is as old as Aristotle, and that all we need do today is to inform and vary the design with our transition needs."<sup>3</sup>

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

George Santayana, a student of William James and later Professor at Harvard got self groomed as a Spanish born American poet and later a novelist had many shades in his personality. Delving into the details of the historical facts and thereby drawing solutions to the modern age problems through it, was his basic endeavour. With James "Pragmatism" at disposal, he too relied immensely on the possible efficacy of reason and therefore introduced the spirit of practical approach in all activities of human affairs. A keen follower of Plato who willingly propagated the ideas in manifold activities but also struggled through Atheism to catch the genuine glimpses of poetic beauty and sensibility.

'Admitting the objective existence of the material world, Santayana held that only "Essences" could be cognised, i.e. real or possible qualities of things which appear in cognition as signs of his objects. In his understanding of the "essences" Santayana was close to Plato and Husserl (q.v.). Santayana regarded consciousness as an epiphenomenon (q.v.); Cognition is a passive reflection of reality. In aesthetics he defined the beautiful as "Objective Pleasure". In Ethics he supported escapism.<sup>4</sup> With Pragmatism, at least in the beginning, as the basic rung of the ladder to advance, it is but natural that most of the prevailing idealistic theories would get automatically dismissed. But then with a matured outlook and growing poetic sensitivity, the philosopher is bound to look around for the other probability, little generously for obtaining solace. However, the fact remains that ultimate reality rarely comes in the initial attempts as life always throws challenges to one and all, in every phase. Compromising over many issues and reconciling for the betterment would naturally lead to more vistas and close to the Truth.

**REFERENCES:**

- [1]. Thomas Henry and Thomas Dana Lee, Living Biographies of Great Philosophers, Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1993, pp. 277, 278.
- [2]. *ibid*, 279.
- [3]. Durant Will, The Greatest Minds And Ideas of All Time, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2002, p. 25.
- [4]. Dictionary of Philosophy, Edited by I. Frolov, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1984, p. 368.

Prof. Dr. G.N. Sharma, et. al. "George Santayana: The Aristocratic & Philosophical Aloofness." *Quest Journals Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 08(11), 2020, pp. 56-59.