



**THE ROLE OF THE ARYA SAMAJ IN INDIA'S
STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE**

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In the December issue of Nidan issued by the Dept. of Hindu Studies, there is an article entitled SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S IMPACT ON INDIAN HISTORY. In the article, the writer S. Rajamani made the following reference to the role of the Arya Samaj in the struggle for Independence of India:

"It could be said that there were others in the field such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society and others working along the same lines; but their influence was peripheral and limited to a few individuals or sections of society".

S. Rajamani's attempt to establish that Swami Vivekananda and the institutions he created made conscious efforts towards India's political independence is misleading. The works of the Swami clearly indicate that he was totally indifferent to the country's political affairs. He had nothing to do with politics. And even though he lived at a time when British imperialism was firmly entrenched in India, the Swami never spoke a word about political freedom or social justice. He never challenged the moral foundation of British imperialism. He did not advocate the cause of India's political emancipation nor did he make any conscious efforts towards this goal. With regards to the institutions he created such as the Ramakrishna Mission - they had little to contribute towards the political struggle for the independence of India.

The statement that the contribution of the Arya Samaj to the freedom struggle in India was peripheral, stands not only opposed to recorded Indian history. It also contradicts Swami Vivekananda's statement of facts. "It is an undoubted fact," affirms the Swami, "that if there had not been the advent of Kabir, Nanak, and Chaitanya in the Mohammedan period, and the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj in our own day, then, by this time, the Mohammedans and Christians would have far outnumbered the Hindus of the present day in India." (1) "With regard to questions of fact," observes French servant, Romain Rolland, "he (Swami Dayanand) went further than Brahmo Samaj and even further than the Ramakrishna Mission venture of today. (2)

The Arya Samaj was undoubtedly the most dynamic socio-religious reform movement modern society has ever seen. "Among all the socio-religious reform movements, which tended to have a national scope and a program of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres" in the words of D. Pande, "the Arya Samaj was the most important". (3) In his book "New India", Sir Henry Cotton characterizes the history of the movement as "one of the most important, and interesting chapters of Modern Hindu Thought." (4) Census Officer Mr. Blunt in 1912 termed it "the greatest movement in India of the past half century". (5)

Though the Arya Samaj was primarily concerned with social and religious reforms, its political impact was most conspicuous. As early as 1905 an English monthly proclaimed "of all movements in India for the political regeneration of the country none is so potent as the Arya Samaj. The ideal of that society, as proclaimed by its founder is an absolutely free and independent form of nation". (6) Swami Dayanand and the powerful organization he initiated, the Arya Samaj clearly unquestionably were the most potent factors in reforming, rejuvenating and rebuilding the institutions of India's political emancipation. Describing Swami Dayananda's contribution towards creating the national consciousness, Romain Rolland writes, "How great and uplifting of the people he was - the most vigorous force of the immediate and present action in India at the movement of the rebirth and re-awakening of the national consciousness. His Arya Samaj prepared the way in 1905 for the revolt of Bengal. He was one of the most ardent prophets of reconstruction and of national organization. I feel that it was he who kept the Vigil". (7)

"The real foundation of modern independent India was laid by Dayanand." These words of D. Vable (8) are but recurrences of recorded facts. Swami Dayanand was the arch-prophet of freedom in India, indeed the ground-maker of a powerful movement of Indian politico-economic liberation.

In 1875, for the first time in the history of modern India, Swami Dayanand made a forceful plea for India's political independence, "Say what you will, self-government is by far the best. A foreign government perfectly free from religious prejudices, impartial towards all the natives and foreigners - kind, beneficial and just though it may be - can never render the people perfectly happy". (9) Swami Dayanand was the first to rise against British dominion, the first Indian to use the word Swaraj, self-government. In the words of Mrs. Anne Besant, "Swami Dayanand was the first to proclaim India for Indians."(10)

Messages of revolt against the alien yoke pervade the Swami's works which from time to time formed the source of political inspiration - rousing people into active resistance to the alien influences." One day Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak saw to his amazement the renowned Parsi patriot Dada Bhai Naoroji turning over pages of Satyarth Prakash. He asked the Patriot, have you become an Arya Samajist? "No I get great respiration from Swami Dayananda's work in my struggle for Swarajya" was the reply. (11) Such was impact of Swamiji's political messages. Even his prayers echoed some political sentiment like, "let foreigners not rule our country, may we not lose our independence". (12)

Speaking of the general causes which lead to political changes Swami Dayananda wrote, "When people acquire perfection in the military science and the art of war, and the army becomes so formidable that no one in the whole world can stand against it on a field of battle, pride and party spirit increase among them who then become unjust. Thereafter they lose all power either through mutual dissension, or a strong man from among families of little importance rises to distinction and is powerful enough to subjugate them, just as Shivaji and Govinda Singh rose against the Mohammedan rule and almost completely annihilated the Mussalman power in India". (13) Quoting this passage B.B.Majumdar in his work "History of Indian Social and political Ideas" writes, "With unerring instinct Swami Dayanand hits upon the psychological factors which are bound to bring about the fall of a ruling power. He was shrewd enough to hint merely at the eventuality of the loss of power by the British, without directly mentioning them by names". (14)

It is noteworthy that long before the rise of the Indian National Congress Swami Dayananda included in the curriculum compulsory military training and the use of firearms. There is some truth, therefore, in the remarks of a rather unsympathetic critic Valentine Chirol, "... the whole drift of Dayananda's teachings is far less to reform Hinduism than to range it into active resistance to the alien influence which threatened, in his opinion, to denationalize it."

Despite some fundamental points of difference between Swami Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi, the former may be considered as the forerunner of Gandhi and the morning star of Indian Independence. It was Dayananda indeed who prepared the ground for Gandhi and that while Gandhi has been universally acknowledged as the father of the nation, A.A.Aiyangar, the former speaker of the Indian Parliament described Dayananda as "The Grandfather of the Nation". (15)

At a time when each province was developing its own regional language and considered it superior to other provincial languages, when a Bengali would never give up Bengali, when a Marathi and Gujarati could not do away with his language, and while all of them were accepting the claim of English to be a superior language - Swami Dayananda was the first to recognize the importance of Hindi as the LINGUA FRANCA of India. Although a profound Vedic and Sanskrit scholar and although by birth a Gujarati, the Swami wrote his famous work Satyarth Prakash in Hindi. It was certainly a great day in the intellectual history of India when Swamiji sat down to write commentary of Vedas in Hindi. By making the Vedic wisdom which has so long been the monopoly of ecclesiastical groups available in Hindi, he initiated a force of great significance in the political body of India. He encouraged the people to support the cause of Hindi before Mr. Hunter, the chairperson of the Education Commission appointed by the government of India.

Swami Dayananda emphasized national unity. The cause of India's degeneration, according to him was mutual feuds. He writes "when two brothers quarrel among themselves, the third one becomes the Panch." (16) Hence he expressed the view that Indian rulers should create a com-

mon national sentiment and a common faith in their states." (17) Swami Dayananda wanted to unite the various Indian rulers who were scattered and had no unity. In his own words, "I wish to bring the Rajas and Maharajas on to the right path and unite the Arya race into one whole." (18) He therefore, set forth with the task of reforming their daily routine. He taught the Maharana of Udaipur the Manusmriti and that portion of the Mahabharat that treats politics and the development of character. The Swami's teaching had the desired effect. The Maharana followed Swamiji's advice and gave up promiscuity. He also became averse to taking a second Wife. (19)

Dayananda's desire of Swadeshi became nurtured in all domains and had a tremendous political implication. He impressed upon his followers the importance of the use of Swadeshi goods. Under his influence the Maharaja and all the officials of Jodhpur began to use hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. Everyone in the service of that state, from Maharaja down to peons, officials, clerks and the elite of Jodhpur adopted the Khadi produced in Marwar. Thus long before Swadeshi became the cry in Bengal, Marwar had appeared clad in Khadi. (20)

Later the Arya Samaj took the responsibility of completing Swamiji's unfinished work of Swadeshi. In 1817 the members of the Arya Samaj at Lahore took a vow to use Swadeshi things. They each subscribed with a few hundred rupees and ordered cloth made in Bombay and kept it in the Arya Samaj Mandir for sale. The consignment was sold in few days as the demand for swadeshi goods had increased. Similar incidents occurred at other towns and cities in the initial days. (21) In 1894, an institutionalized approach was made to the problem when at Lahore an organization called the Swadeshi Vastu Pracharani Sabha (Society for the propagation of swadeshi goods) was formed. (22) The Sabha started a bilingual paper 'Swadeshi Vastu Pracharaka' in English and Hindi. (23) Later, a great advocate of Swadeshi, Lala Lajpat Raj established another organization named the 'Panjabi Swadeshi Association'. (24)

The Association with individual activists succeeded in spreading the message of Swadeshi throughout northern India. After the partition of Bengal, the Swadeshi Movement reached its climax. In relation to the anti-national move, the entire country resorted to Swadeshi. This made a powerful onslaught on the superstructure of the ruling dominion, paving the way for the attainment of freedom by enlarging the social base of the movement.

Swami Dayananda was fully aware of the filtration theory of education introduced by the British. The great ascetic found that without imparting free and compulsory education it was impossible to revive the glory of India. Long before Gokhale, he discovered the supreme necessity of making education compulsory as he stated, "Both state and society should make it compulsory upon all to send their children both male and female to school after the fifth or eighth year. It should be made a penal offence to keep a child at home after that age". (25)

Around 1870, Swamiji opened several Patashalas (Schools) at Farrukabad, Kashi, Kasganj and Challsar. He also initiated a Kanya Patashala (Girls School) at Meerut. (26) Owing to paucity of funds these schools could not succeed. His Arya Samaj, however, overcame these shortcomings and ran first rate educational institutions of national importance. Between 1886-1918 the Arya Samaj ran over 500 educational institutions throughout India. (27) These institutions included schools, colleges, gurukuls, orphanages, industrial schools, and widow shelter houses. These institutions were the first to include the idea of Swadeshi in their educational programs. They were independent of Government assistance and were staffed and financed only by Indians. The ideas of a true national educational system were embodied in these institutions. Speaking of the achievement of the Arya samaj in the field of education, Jawaharlal Nehru stated, "the Arya Samaj has done very good work in the spread of education both among boys and girls, in improving the condition of women and raising the status and standards of the depressed classes". (28)

The Arya Samaj richly deserved this eulogy. Till the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, the British Government considered the Arya Samaj a potentially dangerous organization. Although not a political organization, the Arya Samaj evoked the sentiments of patriotism. Its members and fol-

lowers in their individual capacity contributed in every way to the struggle for Independence. The Samaj through its Publication media and religious preachers spread the message of strength, power, and freedom throughout Northern India. The impact of the Arya preachers even reached the Indian Soldiers in the Army in advocating open sedition. When the developments caught the attention of the British authorities an order was passed and circulated by the Army Head-quarters that "no Arya is to be allowed to enter the precincts of the regimental barracks." (29) Even the enlistment of Arya Samajis in the Army was forbidden.

In the Indian political movement, the Arya Samaj produced numerous leaders like Shradhdhananda, Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, Veer Savarkar, Madanlal Dhingra, Ram Prasad Bimal, Bhai Parmahand, etc., who gave their lives as martyrs to be sacrificed at the altar of the country. It would not be an exaggeration to add that most of the persons who were jailed or hanged were from Arya Samaj. Many of the members and followers of the Arya Samaj joined the ranks of the revolutionary movement and took active part in the revolutionary struggle for independence. To cite a few examples: three prominent Arya activists Master Amir Chand, Bhai Balmukand and Ballraj Bhalla were charged for conspiring to kill Lord Hardings, the Viceroy on the occasion of his first state entry into Delhi on 23 December 1912. Amir Chand and Balmukand were hanged in Ambala jail on 11 May 1915, and Balraj was exiled to the Andamans. In the sorrow of unbearable pain of separation from her husband Balmukand, sacrificed her life by fasting unto death. (30)

During 1924-25 an well-organized revolutionary society was instituted in U.P. Among its various important activities, the Kakori incident was the most famous. Ram Prasad Bismal from Arya Samaj background was the chief leader who planned Kakori incident to fund freedom struggle. He together with two followers Thakur Roshan Singh and Vishnu Sharan Dublis were arrested in connection with the Kakori incident at Lucknow. Ram Prasad Bismai and Thakur Roshan Singh were sentenced to death while Dublis was exiled to the Andamans. (31) Madan Lal Dhingra in London killed Lord Curzon Waylie who was responsible for massacre of thousands of innocent people including children and women, who were attending the lecture in Jallianwallah Bagh. The main participants of famous Rawalpindi liberation movement of 1907 were all from Arya Samaj.

Arya Samaj revolutionaries worked strenuously for India's freedom in foreign countries too. In England, Shyamji Krishna Varma, a follower of Swami Dayananda started an English monthly, "The Indian Sociologist" - An organ of political, social and religious reform and freedom movement in 1905. In the same year he also formed the India Home Rule Society with the following objectives:

- To secure Home Rule for India.
- To carry on propaganda in the U.K
- To spread among the people of India a knowledge of the advantages of freedom and national unity. (32)

Another organization sharing similar scheme and objectives named Ghadr Party was formed in the U.S.A. in 1913 by Kashi Ram and Hat Dayal. During the First World War, a large number of them sailed out to India. They raided British Government Treasury at Moga on 25 November 1914 which, they considered belonged to the people of India, to provide funds for the freedom movement. The British hanged Kashi Ram to death. Bhai Parmanand and Jagat Ram Haryanavi were sentenced to life imprisonment in connection with the Ghat rebellion. (33)

In the beginning of 1915 Sohan Lal Pathak chose Burma as the center of his revolutionary activities. An essential part of his program was to spread the spirit of Independence among the Indian troops stationed there. He was apprehended and was hanged to death.

These are the few examples that describe the sacrifices made by the members of the Arya Samaj in the magnificent revolutionary freedom movement of India. Arya Samaj sacrificed more members and followers in the freedom struggle than any other religious body. A review of all Mahatma Gandhi Satyagraha Movement clearly indicated that the Arya Samaj had contributed the most to the Freedom Struggle. In 1912 after conducting a survey of all the jails throughout the country, a special committee under the chairmanship of Nehru, presenting its report to the Indian National Congress disclosed that about 70 % of those undergoing extreme hardship in the jails of the British government are Arya Samajis. (35) Most of the lawyers who boycotted the British courts to participate in the freedom struggle were also Arya Samajis. According to Mahavir Tyagi at the time of the Kilafat Movement 82% of all the men and 92% of all the women at Agra were all Arya Samajis. (36) In 1931 a report presented to the congress committee by Molana Hasrat revealed that about 80% of the Satyagrahis (peaceful participants in the independence movement of India) locked in jails throughout the country were Arya Samajis. (37)

Great Historian Pannikar stated that Arya Samaj inspired 80% of those who participated in the freedom struggle of India.

Thus, in whatever way we consider the Freedom Struggle in India, the contribution of the Arya Samaj was the most important and the most significant. No single, Hindu organization could equal or surpass this contribution.