

Arya Samaj and Cultural Re-Awakening in colonial Bihar (1875-1947)

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This study is an attempt to look into the process of cultural re-awakening in Bihar before independence and to see how far social, educational and religious works of Arya Samaj led to the cultural consciousness among the backward sections of the Hindu society. The objective of the paper is to highlight the philanthropic works of Arya Samaj in colonial Bihar and to clear doubt on some of the misgivings. The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 and sought to revive the pristine purity of Vedic Hinduism, began to make its presence felt in 1880s in Bihar. The samaj formed Sudhi movement to prevent low castes from conversion to other religion and to reclaim those who had already been converted. In Bihar, it had a strong appeal for low castes such as Kurmis, Keoris, Goalas, Mushashars etc.

Keywords:

Cultural Re-awakening, Philanthropic works, Gaurakshini Sabhas, Janeu Andolan, Shuddhi and Sangathan

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The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 and sought to revive the pristine purity of Vedic Hinduism, began to make its presence felt in 1880s in Bihar. Initially, as a staunch supporter of cow protection, it was instrumental in establishing Gaurakshini (Cow Protection) Sabhas.ⁱ These sabhas had been strongest in western Bihar, mainly in Patna. An official correspondence mentions that there were 23 Sabhas in 1893.ⁱⁱ McLane mentions that most of the districts of western Bihar had cow protection societies which were formed in 1887 and 1888. Major

Zamindars, including the Rajas of Darbhanga, Dumraon, Hathua and Bettiah reportedly helped the cause of the movement along with the priests of Gaya. Similar Sabhas were also active in Darbhanga and Mahbubani.ⁱⁱⁱ Jawaid Alam in his book “Government and Politics in Colonial Bihar” observed that ‘The Brahmin, Rajput and Bhumihar gentries figured pre-dominantly in organizing the cow-protection movement in Bihar and its influence was more strong in Saran, Shahabad, Gaya and Patna ... in the first two decades of the 20th century, the movement attracted Ahirs in large numbers who were anxious to emulate the upper-castes by reaffirming their special commitment to the cow-protection movement. Actually, inspired by the sense of upward mobility, the middle -ranking castes such as Ahirs, Koeris and Kurmis also took active part in the cow-protection movement along with the upper-castes. Some low-caste Hindus also followed the suit. The involvement of the middle -ranking and low-caste Hindus who used threats and intimidation in vulgar ways to organize the campaign, added more fanaticism to the cow-protection agitation.’^{iv}

The Arya Sabha’s activities in Bihar in the last quarter of the 19th century have also been significant in others. The followers of the Arya Sabha opened schools, established Arya temples, orphanages and other social welfare organisations in different parts of Bihar. A powerful Janeu Andolan was organized under the aegis of Arya Sabha in Bihar to upliftment lower caste Hindus. It is noteworthy that the founder of Arya Samaj Swami Dayanand Saraswati himself did yajnyopavit(sacred thread) to one Madholal ,by caste a Kayatha in 1879 ,and thus laid the foundation of Janeu Andolan in Bihar. Fighting primarily against ‘Orthodox’ Sanatani Hindus, Samajists also carried with them their notions of Hindu history and civilization which came into play when the political mobilization process began in a big way from the days of Non-Cooperation. Samajists like Janakdhari Lal, Bhawani Dayal Sanyasi and Mohit Mishra worked for the upliftment of lower caste Hindus.^v By the second decade of 20th century, Arya Samaj had a number of branches in different parts of Bihar.

In fact, the impact of the Arya Samaj on the life of the Hindus in Bihar was felt from the very beginning.^{vi} The spread of the movement here, owed its origin to Dayanand himself. He came to Bihar on his way to Calcutta in 1872. Touring Dumraon and Arrah in connection with his campaign against idol worship, he arrived at Patna on 6 Septemeber, 1872. Then he went to Monghyr and Bhagalpur where he had a discourse (Shastrartlz) with the orthodox Hindus. He

also gave public lecture, preaching against idolatry and challenging the orthodox Brahmans to have Shastrarth (discourse) with him.^{vii}

While coming back from Bengal in early 1873, he stopped again at Bhagalpur and Patna and delivered speeches condemning idols, 'Shraddha' and 'Puranas'. He arrived at Chapra on 25 May 1873 and was cordially received by Rai Shivagulam Sah. The orthodox Brahmans of Chapra brought one Pandit Jagannath to have a discourse with Dayanand. He was badly defeated by Dayanand, which infuriated the orthodox Brahmans. The Bihar Darpan for May 1873 contained an interesting note on this incident.^{viii}

Makhan Lal and Shyamlal of Danapur went to Mirzapur to invite Dayanand in 1879. They brought him to Danapur on 30 October and Dayanand Saraswati camped in the bungalow of Jones, a merchant. Dayanand, while campaigning for the Arya Samaj ideals at Danapur, converted many persons to his fold.^{ix}

The very presence of Dayanand at Danapur turned the place into a strong hold of Arya Samaj in Bihar. It has continued to occupy a central place for the Samaj activities since then. Danapur as the headquarters of the Arya Samaj movement for the whole of Eastern India turned into a place of pilgrimage for the Arya Samajists in the early years of the present century. In 1901 when the 24th anniversary of the Danapur branch was celebrated, a proposal for organizing a 'prantiya Prathinidhi Sabha' was discussed.^x There were 16 Arya Samajs in Bihar at that time. On 5 October 1904 the 'Arya Prathinidhi Sabha' for Bihar and Bengal was established with the headquarters at Patna. Balkrishna Sahay, a Vakil of Ranchi, and Mithila Sharan Singh a Vakil of Patna, were elected President and Secretary respectively.^{xi} After the death of Balkrishna Sahay who had the distinction of becoming, one of the Vice- President of the All India Arya Samaj in 1911, Shyam Krishna Sahay, was elected the Secretary for Bihar. He remained the Secretary until 1918 when Ranchi became the headquarters of the Samaj - an important centre of Arya Samaj activity in Bihar. Eventually when Shankar Nath of Arya Samaj and Hargovind Gupta of Calcutta became the chief office bearers, the office was transferred to Calcutta.^{xii}

Around 1911 the Arya Samaj movement seems to have made a strong appeal in North India. The including of the Arya Samaj in Phulwari Thana of Patna was so great that about 2575 Aryas were recorded in the census of 1911.^{xiii} The lower castes of the Patna district responded most

enthusiastically to this new movement because the theory of the submergence of caste in the Arya community appealed very much to the lower castes. These regarded Dayanand as their saviour and his system as aiming at improving their position and bringing them at par with the upper classes.^{xiv} The samaj formed Sudhi movement to prevent low castes from conversion to other religion and to reclaim those who had already been converted. In Bihar, it had a strong appeal for low castes such as Kurmis, Koeris, Goalas and Mushashars.^{xv}

The first centre to be established in Bihar was that at Danapur in 1875. The main credit for its establishment goes to Shri Gulabchand Lalji.^{xvi} Danapur had the privilege of having Swami Dayanand Saraswati on its soil on 30 October 1879. It was at this time that he had declared Shri Madhaviaji, the Trustee of his trust.^{xvii} To fulfill the aims, ideals and works of the Aryam Samaj, Shri Madhaviaji established an Arya Sanskrit Pathshala, which was eventually turned into Aryan Anglo Middle School. This very Middle School, which was established in 1875, is at present known as the D.A.V. Uchha Vidyalaya, Danapur. This institution is for the 1st hundred years awakening thousands of students to the importance of Vedic ideas and ideals.

Another institution run by the Danapur branch is Shri Madhyanand Anathalaya, known as "Vanita Ashram", established in 1903 by an eminent Arya Samaji named Shyam Lal Chaudhary. This Ashram had its building near Danapur Bus Stand. It looks after the food, clothing and education of orphan children whom they kept there. Balika Vidya Mandir, established in the Thakur Shah Estate land, Arya Kumar Sabha and Arya Veer Dal are other very famous organizations of Danapur.^{xviii}

In Shahabad district, the Arya Samaj was established in 1878, with a view to bring out all round social reforms in Hindu Society. The main works included extensive social services in the district such as Hindu widow marriage, girls' education, child marriage, abolition of untouchability, adult education, literacy campaign etc.

Arya Samaj, Ranchi was established in 1894, primarily with a view to propagate the Vedic Philosophy as propounded by Dayanand Saraswati. It started publishing a weekly, named the 'Aryavarta' in 1897 and opened a school named, 'Ved Vidyalaya in 1900. Both of these were functional till 1908-09. To carry out its programme, it has been arranging lectures and discourses by scholars. It also holds a weekly meeting every Sunday in its Mandir on the Shraddhanand

Road. It keeps paid preachers to carry out its mission. Persons of other faiths are admitted into the folds of the 'Arya Samaj' though 'shudhi' (i.e. purification). In respect of social activities, the Samaj has been working for the upliftment of the aboriginals, depressed and backward classes.^{xix}

Another Arya Samaj centre to be established in Bihar was at Bara Bazar, Monghyr on 13 April 1897. Thereafter Various centres of Arya Samaj were established throughout the Monghyr district. In 1924, 'Sumitra Arya Anathalaya' was established. A 'Vidhwa Ashram' was established for the welfare of widows. Shri Satynarayan Sharma gifted to the Arya Samaj his house at Mania Chauraha, and two schools were also established by the Samaj there. These were the Samprati Swami Dayanand Arya Visy Bhawan and Arya Bal Niketan. Both these institutions are busy educating the students along Vedic lines.^{xx}

The Arya Samaj centre at Siwan was established in 1898. In course of time, the Samaj received a lot of land as gift and so established a number of social welfares institutions there. The chief among them were, D.A.V. Pathshala, D.A.V. Dalitodowar Pathshala, D.A.V. Middle School, D.A.V. High School, Arya Kanya Middle School, Shri Bramanand Vidwa Anath Ashram, D.A.V. College, Arya Kanya Uchha Vidyalaya and Dayanand Ayurvedic College. The credit for the successful running of these institutions should be given to Shri Baidnath Prasadji (Darhi Baba). In 1915 the Arya Samaj Mandir was also finally completed with public donation in Siwan.^{xxi}

The Arya Samaj at Maner was established in 1899. Fakirchand Sahu gifted a piece of land to the Samaj in which the Samaj runs an 'Arya Kanya Vidyalaya.'^{xxii} The Khushrupur centre of the Arya Samaj was established in 1903 by the cooperation and help of some local Arya Samajis. In 1919 Khushrupur became the permanent abode of Shri Munishwaranandji Maharaj. Babu Raghunandan Prasadji being impressed by the ideals of the Arya Samaj made over his entire moveable as well as immoveable property to the Samaj, by a Trust made in 1932. By the influence of Babu Narayan Singhji, a resident of Patna City, the place was rid of its anti-social elements and on 10th February, 1919, an institute named Shri Vijaya Gau Rakshini was established. On 22 June 1919, 'Dayanad Bal Vidyalaya' was established and in 1923, the Vidyalaya building was made. After that in 1924 the Dayanand Kanya Vidyalaya, Khushrupur

building was established. Later Shri Ram Dasji gave his entire moveable and immovable property to Dayanand Sanskrit Ved Vidyalaya, Khushrupur.^{xxiii}

The Arya Samaj, Barh, established in 1906, runs Arya Kanya Vidyalaya, Bal Vidya Sadan, Datavya Aushadhalaya, Arya Mahila Samaj Mandir, and Vedic Mandir.

The Arya Samaj, Bankipur was established in the house of Khajanchi Sahib at Khajanchi Road on 5th of May, 1906. By the efforts of Dr. Singheswar Prasadji, the Arya Kumar Sabha was established at Machuatoli Akhara in 1909. After this, Shri Kunkun Sahji by spending four thousand rupees constructed a Vedic Hindi Pustakalaya Bhawan. It also runs a Vyayamshala and a Yajnashtala in the premises of its headquarters. The Samaj has also taken up a scheme of moral education to public to dissuade them from drinks, gambling and such other vices and write out mottoes, such as 'nasha chhoro sach bolo'(quit drinking, speak truth),etc. on vantage points. The educational institutions of the Samaj are - Dayanand School, Mithapur, Dayanand Primary School, Bankipur, Dayanand Kanya Vidyalaya, Mithapur, started in 1928 and Dayanand Kanya Vidyalaya, Nayatola. The Dayanand Kanya Vidyalaya (Mithapur) started as a Nimn Prathmik Pathashala and gradually developed into a high school.^{xxiv} Besides these, a Vedic School, called the Shraddhanand Vedic School was also established at Patna City. The school imparted education along Vedic lines.^{xxv}

The Samaj of Khagaria (Monghyr), established in 1913, has a Vedic Pustakalaya with 700 books in it. Besides this, there are the Arya Kumar Sabha, Arya Veer Dal, Mahila Arya Samaj, Arya Kanya Vidyalaya, Madhya Vidyalaya Primary Pathshala, Shri Nathuni Yogashala and Shri Govinda Sthal. The Chief donor of the Khagaria Samaj is Babu Shyam Lal Verma, whose entire property was turned into a trust, which maintains the Samaj institutions and runs the Shyam Lal Rashtriya Ucha Vidyalaya, at Khagaria.

Arya Samaj, (Bhagalpur) was established in 1916. At Bhagalpur, the Samaj has three centres at Deepnagar (Mansurganj), Nathnagar and Mahila Aryasamaj, Mandichak Aryasamaj. The Samaj here has made remarkable contribution in the field of social reform. They did a lot for the removal of untouchability and caste distinctions on birth. They preached that caste distinctions should be made on merit and talent not on birth. Welfare of women was one of the important fields in which the Samaj worked hard. They encouraged women to receive education.

They gave women equality. They did a lot to help women who were poor, helpless and in distress including orphans, widows and prostitutes. It has a library with 2,500 books in English, Hindi and Urdu.^{xxvi}

The Arya Samaj Mandir (Darbhanga) was established in 1921 at Laheriasarai. Essentially, it was a religious institution, which aimed at the revival of Vedic culture. The Arya Samaj of Laheriasarai had engaged itself in widow marriage, inter- caste marriage, rehabilitating helpless and abandoned women and children, and cremation of the unclaimed dead bodies of Hindus etc. The Samaj also ran a Girls Middle School at Laheriasarai and had branches at Madhubani, Samastipur, Rosera, Bettiah, Tajpur, Jainagar and Kamtare.^{xxvii}

Arya Samaj, Malshi (Gopalganj), established in 1930, runs an Arya Bal Vikas Vidyalaya, besides Arya Samaj Mandir, Vedic Pustakalaya and Vachnalaya and Arya Kanya Vidyalaya.^{xxviii}

The Arya Samaj Mandir was established in 1933 at Dhanbad. Essentially, a religious institution the Arya Samaj branches associate themselves with various social service works like widow remarriage, inter- caste marriage, rehabilitating the helpless and abandoned women and children etc. The Arya Samaj also runs the D.A.V. Higher Secondary School and the D.A.V. Middle School at Dhanbad and has branches at Sindri, Katrans and Jharia.^{xxix} Arya Samaj, (Daltonganj) was established in 1937-37 by the efforts of Ram Bahadur Jagustji. The Samaj has a double storeyed building. Besides this the Samaj has a three storeyed Dayanand Madhyamik Arya Vidyalaya. There is also an Arya Uchha Vidyalaya there.

During the 1920s the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha became more active in the province. Apart from Saran, Champaran, Shahabad and Gaya, which had been the principal centres of the Arya Samaj activities, several new centres were opened in other districts. In February 1923, the Bhartiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha was established with its headquarters in Agra with Swami Shraddhananda as its President.^{xxx} The Hindu Sabhas carried out some conversions through Shuddhi, but most of the conversions were undertaken by the Arya Samaj, the Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha, and the Kshatriya Upakarini Sabha.^{xxxi} Invariably, Shuddhi became an important symbol of sangathan with the active support of orthodox Hindu groups, and confronted Islam far too decisively, creating a discord at the social base. Swami Shraddhanand visited Bihar on his mission to spread the Shuddhi Movement and to raise funds for the cause

of Shuddhi during July-August 1923, and addressed meetings at Agra, Patna and Bhagalpur.^{xxxii} Though his visit to Bihar passed off quietly, there were considerable apprehension among Muslims. The Arya Samaj campaign for reconversion of Rajput Muslims into the Hindu fold led to a vigorous counter-campaign by the Muslims which strained relations between the two communities.

Stirred by the Shuddhi and Sangathan movemnets, the Muslims organized Tabligh and Tanzim. The Tanzim movement is generally considered as a counter movement of Sangathan and of similar in nature. The Tabligh movement was started formally in 1926 by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas to revive the Islamic spirit among the Muslim community. In a sense, the Tabligh movement was a Muslim missionary response to the militant Hindu efforts of Shuddhi and Sangathan.^{xxxiii}

However, the biggest obstacle in the path of Hindu organisational unity at this stage was the conflict between the traditional orthodox Sanatanis and reformists like the Arya Samajis. Hardcore Sanatanis were so hostile to any change in their rituals and social practices that they were more critical of the Arya Samajis than Muslims. When they discovered that the Hindu Sabha was also supporting some reformist demands they became very critical of the Sabha as well. The debate over the status of untouchables must have disheartened Hindu Sabha leaders.^{xxxiv}

At its Banaras session in August 1923, Swami Shraddhananda called in a resolution for practical measures as a ‘prelude to the assimilation of the untouchables into the great body of the Aryan fraternity ‘. The question of uprooting the curse of untouchability, he explained, was the sine qua non of nationality in India.^{xxxv}

ⁱ Patel, Hitendra K – Aspects of Hindu Mobilization in Modern Bihar, IHC, Proceedings,65th Session,2004, P. 801

ⁱⁱ Ibid, Also as Quoted from McLane John R., -Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress, Princeton University press,1977, P.309

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, in Pandey,Gyanendra- Rallying Round the cow : Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region,C.1888-1917

^{iv} Alam,Jawaid - Government and Politics in Colonial Bihar, Mittal Publications, New Delhi-110059,p.169-170.

^v Patel, Hitendra K – Op.cit, p.801

^{vi} Diwakar, R.R., Bihar through the Ages, Bombay, 1959, p. 678.

^{vii} Pandey,S.N, Education and Social Changes in Bihar, Delhi, 1975, p. 147.

^{viii} Sharda, Har Bilas, Life of Dayanand Saraswati, 1946, Ajmer, p. 96.

^{ix} Ibid, pp. 236-237.

^x S.N. Pandey, op.cit. p. 148.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid., P.149

- ^{xiii} Census Report of India, 1911, Vol. V, Part I, p. 211.
- ^{xiv} Sharda, Har Bilas, op.cit. pp. 81-82.
- ^{xv} Srinivas, M.N., Social Changes in Modern India, New Delhi, 1972 p. 10 I.
- ^{xvi} Bihar Rajya Arya Samaj Sthapna Shatabdi and Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Swarna Jayanthi Samaroh Smarika, p. 136.
- ^{xvii} Arya Samaj, Smritigranth, Sthapna Shatabdi, 1875-1975, Danapur, p. 14.
- ^{xviii} Ibid. p. 16.
- ^{xix} Choudhury, P.C. Ray, Bihar District Gazetteer, Ranchi, Patna, 1975, p. 104.
- ^{xx} Choudhary, P.C. Ray, Bihar District Gazetteer Monghyr, Patna, 1976, p. 89.
- ^{xxi} Bihar Rajya Arya Samaj Sthapna Shatabdi, op.cit, p. 139.
- ^{xxii} Ibid.
- ^{xxiii} Ibid. p. 137
- ^{xxiv} Dayanand Kanya Vidyalaya, Golden Jubilee Souvenir (1928-78), Patna, p. 68.
- ^{xxv} P.C. Ray Chaudhuri, op. cit., p. 91.
- ^{xxvi} Bihar Pratinidhi Sabha Swarna Jayanti Smarika, Patna, p. 140; Danapur Arya Samaj Sthapana Shatabdi Smrithigramh, p. 61.
- ^{xxvii} Chaudhary, P.C. Ray, Bihar District Gazetteer, Darbhanga, Patna, 1967, p. 60
- ^{xxviii} Bihar Pratinidhi Sabha Swarna Jayanthi Smarika, p. 140.
- ^{xxix} P.C. Ray Choudhury, Bihar District Gazetteer, Dhanbad, 1956, p. 9
- ^{xxx} The Leader, 11 March 1923, P. 7, Microfilm, NMML; Home Poll; File 140, 1925, NAI, As cited from Prabhu Bapu – Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, p. 51
- ^{xxxi} Bapu, Prabhu – Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930, Constructing nation and history, Routledge, 2013, P-51
- ^{xxxii} Alam, Jawaid- Government and Politics in Colonial Bihar, P. 175
- ^{xxxiii} Ibid.
- ^{xxxiv} Details of these debates can be seen in Sanatan Dharma Patka, 1924, No. 1, p. 33, 1925, No. 2, P. 27-34, No. p. 7-14, No. 11, p. 49-54; 1926, No. 2, p. 8-10, 14-18: No. 5, p. 59; No. 6, p. 29-30, As quoted from Hitendra K. Patel, 'Aspects of Hindu Mobilisation in Modern Bihar, IHC: Proceedings, 65th Session, 2004. p. 805.
- ^{xxxv} Bapu Prabhu – Op.cit., P-52

