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Swami Shraddhananda and His Role in Awakening a Hindu Consciousness in The 1920s

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Abstract

Swami Shraddhananda (1856-1926) propagated the valuable teachings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati and he played a prominent role on the *Shuddhi* and the *Sangathan* movement in the 1920s. He was one of the greatest Hindu innovators of India who is popularly known as the saviour of the dying race. He felt that there had been a steady decline of the Hindu Community since the Vedic golden age. The present article is an attempt to highlight the role played by Shraddhananda towards a re-awakening of the Hindu race. The paper proposes to examine why Shraddhananda resigned from the Congress Party and how he linked up the *Sangathan* movement with the *Shuddhi* movement. In this article an attempt will also be made to find out why the Northern Indian provinces responded to this movement so much comparison to the scanty response of the Bengal province.

Keywords: Swami Shraddhananda, *shuddhi*, *sangathan*, Hindu Mahasabha, Malkanas, Rashtra Mandir, awakening

Introduction

Swami Shraddhanand also known as Mahatma Munshi Ram was an Arya Samaj missionary who propagated the valuable teachings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He started Hindu reform movement in the 1920s. In 1917, Swami Shraddhanand took *sansys* and was involved in Hindu reform movement and the Indian Independence movement.¹ He spread the social ideals of the Arya Samaj Movement. He strongly condemned Hindu orthodoxy, caste rigidities, untouchability and advocated widow remarriage, education of women. He started working with the Congress but when he realised that the Muslim remains a Muslim, they even could stop Congress meeting for the sake of their *Namaj*. Under this circumstances, he considered that the Hindu *Dharma* was suffering injustice under the Congress supremacy than he left the Congress party and established a new party named the *Hindu Mahasabha* with the help of Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946).

Shraddhananda believed that Hindus continue a constant decline since the Vedic golden age when foreign invasions were started with the Muslim and its effect steady reduction of the Hindu culture and society. It was only a step in confirming the pre-occupation with Hindu numbers in the mind of one who was engaged in trying to produce a Hindu constituency. In 1925, Swami Shraddhanand had declared in the course of a speech in Patna, that he had been seized by the problem of the dying out of the Hindu race after reading a book by one U. N. Mukherji entitled, *Hindus- A Dying Race*.² He imagined that Hindus become a minority community in future. It is likely to be mentioned that U. N. Mukherjee's book 'A *Dying Race*' (1909) have been responded towards the formation of Hindus consciousness. During 1910-1923, Bengali Hindus did not much involving in the activities of the All India Hindu Mahasabha. In this perspective, P. K. Datta pointed out that this obsession with figures has been long associated with the Hindu culture and physical features in Hindu nationalist writings: the Hindus are here seen as weak notably because of their division into castes, whereas social classes in England are seen as bonded by common sentiments, 'such as those provided by sports, defence requirements and church activities-----Islam too had produced a sense of commonness through masjid congregations'.³

Shaddhananda estimated that the Hindu nation implied seriously implementing the agenda of

the Hindu *sangathan* movement and social reform was essential for the unity among Hindus. In the late 1920s, it had launched reforms for untouchable uplift and the removal of caste barriers like social inequalities and poverty; there might be the conversion of the lower castes to Islam and Christianity.⁴ In this situation, the upper-caste Hindus were impelled to 'immediately bring lower castes within Hindu fold'; otherwise they became Muslims.⁵ The decrease of the Hindu numbers was reproved on the carelessness of the Hindu *jati* (race) and its intense hatred of the lower castes.⁶ The *Hindu Mahasabha* initiated steps to abolition of the untouchability as a core issue of *sangathan* relation to the reform of Hindu society in the 1920 and 1930s.⁷ The *Hindu Mahasabha* session at Benaras (1923), Swami Shradhdhananda proposed a resolution 'prelude to the assimilation of the Aryan fraternity.'⁸ The *Hindu Mahasabha* supported the Shradhdhananda's resolution regarding the access of the untouchables to schools, wells, roads and temples in India.⁹ After six months later the *Hindu Mahasabha's* session at Allahabad (1924) the *sanatanists* (orthodox Hindu) passed another resolution on the caste system and void Shradhdhananda's resolution. In this circumstance, most *shuddhi* rites led by the Arya samaj for the purification and regarding the untouchables would not be recognised by the *Mahasabha*.¹⁰ His life was fully devoted for the upliftment of the depressed Hindus. The resolution emphasised a victory for the *sanatanists* particularly Brahmans, landlords and princes who were alienated by the caste reform.¹¹ Shradhdhananda was very much expressed pang by orthodox Hindu activities and he resigned from the *Hindu Mahasabha* in 1926.¹²

It is important, first of all, to look at the *sangathan* movement was linked up with the *shuddhi* movement. At its Gaya session (December, 1922), the *Hindu Mahasabha* established a *sangathan*, emphasising the need to unify the Hindu community and to defend them from the 'Muslim attacks and violence'.¹³ Madan Mohan Malaviya was the president of the session and he remarked that the Hindu were 'weak and degenerate' as never before, and that there was an imperative need to organise the community.¹⁴ In late 1923, Shradhdhananda became the president of *Bhartiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha*, created with an aim to reconvert Muslims, through *shuddhi* specifically the Malkana Rajputs.¹⁵ He played the leading role in this campaign. He organized a huge gathering for this purpose and purified the Rajputs at Agra, Bharatpur and Mathura etc. got purified under his leadership. The campaign developed with remarkable speed from Agra to Muthura, Aligarh and neighbouring districts. The *shuddhi* enthusiasts claimed not less than 18000 converts in Agra and the neighbourhood in 1924.¹⁶ It is likely to be mentioned that more than 30000 Malkana rajputs were stated to have been converted by the end of 1923 itself and in 1927, it was reported that more than 163000 Malkanas came in the Hindu fold.¹⁷ Thus the mission created a new consciousness and energy among the Hindus and also increased the number of the Hindu organizations. He wrote "The great Aryan nation is said at the present moment to be a dying race, not only because it is completely disorganized."¹⁸

Shradhdhananda estimated that educated Hindus meet to each other in only on rare occasions because they have no common meeting place. The Hindus have no common meeting place and their temples have not sufficient space

where one or two hundred sit together. The Muslims mosques like Juma, Fatehpuri and old mosques have sufficient space where at least serve as meeting places for thousands. But the Hindu, the meeting place is Lakshmi Narayana's Dharamashale which can maximum accommodate 8 hundred and the Muhammadan meetings are free from all noise but the Hindu meetings are not free from all noise. He proposed to build at least one *Hindu Rashtra Mandir* (national temple) every city and major town of India as a first step towards the *Sangathan*.¹⁹ This *Rashtra Mandir* will be charge of the local *Hindu Sabha*. The *Hindu Mahasabha* was re-launched in 1923, adopting *Sangathan* as the chief ideal of a 'Hindu nation' besides promoting the activities of religious organizations such as the *Arya Samaj* in U.P.²⁰

The press played a significant role connection in the growth of Hindu consciousness in Bengal in the twenties. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*²¹ played a vital role in the formation of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha between 1923 and 1926. At that time, the Bengali Hindus felt that they needed an organization like the *Hindu Mahasabha* for the protection their interests but the Bengali response was still very poor. In this regards, the contemporary press reflected on the *shuddhi* and the *sangathan* Movement.²² But the *shuddhi* movement was particularly expressed disapproval in the Muslim press in Bengal and they feared that there were 'thousands of ignorant and illiterate Muslims' who had embed Hindu manners and were 'likely to be carried away by the enticement of *shuddhi* preachers'.²³ But Hindu point of view the *shuddhi* movement was narrated as Hindu right to self-defence. In this respect, a Calcutta paper remarks that the Hindu-Muslim unity remain brittle if the Hindus, without first strengthening themselves, continued to make one sided concessions to the Muslims.²⁴ But the Hindu community based organization in Bengal was developed very slowly as also disorganized and disunited in 1920s, efforts of Madan Mohan Malaviya and Swami Shradhdhanda towards the *shuddhi* and the *sangathan* movement did not response so much in Bengal regarding other provinces.²⁵

On 23rd December, 1926 a Muslim fanatic named Abdul Rashid wished to discuss Islam with Swami Shradhdhananda and he had covered himself with a blanket, inside which he brought a gun. He fired gun shots at Swamiji in his residence at Naya Bazar, Delhi. Many people gathered at the spot, but to there dismay found that Swamiji was no more. Rashid had been caught by his body-guard Dharmapal. Thus Swami Shradhdhanand became a victim of the murderous tradition of Islam; but he attained martyrdom and made his name immortal. We see that after his murder, many *Hindu Mahasabha* leaders were killed by Muslim extremists in a very systematic manner. After the death of Swami Shradhdhananda, the *Hindu Mahasabha* tended not be a communal association for long time.²⁶ In this situation, the Congress passed a unity resolution at Calcutta in 1927 which led to a kind of independent approach in the further course of the *Mahasabha* movement in Bengal.²⁷ The Bengali Hindus slowly perceived that they should be united, otherwise Muslim politics would engulf them, but still, the Hindu organizations did not spread so much as they were supposed to do.

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