

Swadeshi Movement in Colonial Lahore: Education and Nationalism

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Abstract

Although the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College, Lahore, was established primarily as an educational institution dedicated to the promotion of modern learning and Vedic ideals, the political climate of the early twentieth century gradually transformed its public role. This article examines how DAV College evolved from a centre of educational reform into one of the principal institutional bases of the Swadeshi movement in colonial Punjab. It argues that the college functioned as a critical intermediary through which Arya Samaj ideology was translated into political activism, enabling the spread of economic nationalism, anti-colonial sentiment, and public mobilization among the educated Hindu middle class. Using institutional records, contemporary newspapers, government intelligence reports, and Arya Samaj publications, the study explores the introduction of Swadeshi principles into the educational and cultural life of the college, the political leadership of figures such as Lala Lajpat Rai, and the growing participation of students in nationalist campaigns. The article further analyses the tensions that emerged between educational administrators, who sought to preserve the academic character of the institution, and nationalist leaders who regarded the college as an important platform for political mobilization. It also examines the increasing surveillance of the college by the colonial state, which came to view DAV College as a centre of nationalist agitation. The article argues that the history of DAV College demonstrates how educational institutions could become influential political spaces in colonial India, where religious reform, economic nationalism, and anti-colonial politics converged. By tracing this transformation, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between education, civil society, and nationalist politics in late colonial Punjab.

Keywords: Arya Samaj, Swadeshi Movement, Colonial Punjab

Introduction

The Swadeshi movement occupies a central place in the history of Indian nationalism as one of the earliest mass campaigns to challenge British colonial rule through economic self-reliance and the boycott of foreign goods. While its origins are commonly associated with the anti-partition agitation in Bengal after 1905, the movement rapidly acquired wider significance across northern India, particularly in Punjab, where educational and religious institutions became important centres for its dissemination. Among these institutions, the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College, Lahore, emerged as one of the most influential.

Founded in 1886 to advance the educational and religious objectives of the Arya Samaj, DAV College was initially conceived as a non-political institution devoted to producing educated Hindus grounded in both modern knowledge and Vedic values. However, the changing political environment of the early twentieth century increasingly blurred the distinction between education and politics. As nationalist sentiment expanded, the college became an important forum for the dissemination of Swadeshi ideals through student organizations, public lectures, college publications, and the activities of prominent Arya Samaj leaders. This article argues that the political significance of DAV College lay not merely in the participation of its students in nationalist campaigns but in its institutional role in transforming the Arya Samaj's programme of religious and educational reform into organized political activism. The promotion of indigenous industry, the boycott of imported goods, and the cultivation of national consciousness became integral components of campus life, attracting both public support and official suspicion. Colonial intelligence increasingly regarded the college as a centre of nationalist agitation, while internal disagreements within the Arya Samaj reflected competing visions regarding the relationship between education and politics. By examining the interaction between educational reform, religious identity, and nationalist mobilization, this study demonstrates that DAV College was not simply a college that participated in the Swadeshi movement; rather, it became one of the principal institutional vehicles through which Swadeshi ideology was articulated, disseminated, and organized in colonial Punjab.

Swadeshi Movement and DAV College

In the initial period, college was not supposed to propagate any of political activities. However, with the turning of century, that trend had got paradigm transformation and many of its old students had started to spearhead political infusing in many of the national activities. It started with the parallel impact on the student body of DAV College.ⁱ It popularized Swadeshim when the word had not yet become a current coin. The Arya Samaj opened first Swadeshi shop. A detailed introduction of Swadeshi was included in the official scheme of the Arya Samaj. That introduction of Swdeshi concept was also included in the original prospectus of the D.A.V. College, Lahore.¹³ Famous Indian historic shiv is of the opinion that in fact this institution came to be the nucleus of the Swadeshi activities.ⁱⁱ A controversy also erupted in college about the cloth of the student blazer.it was debated that what cloth should be used for the making of college clothe. Whether it is to be from the local manufactures or from the imported lot. Lala Lajpat Rai was the spearhead of that movement. He gave detailed lecture on this theme in the premise of college and got imminent popularity. D.A.V. College Union Magazine also advocated Swadeshi boycott. Thus, Swadeshi was soon turned into a powerful war against the British and D.A.V College Lahore had become the central attention of the high authorities as it was spearheading the activities of Swadeshi movement not only in Lahore but all across the Punjab.ⁱⁱⁱ It had become the most active and dangerous center for all such activates. Government had put it into strongest suspicions and C.I.D was watching its activities very closely. Lala Hans Raj, Principal D.A.V. College was not in favor of student's participation in the non-cooperation movement. His warning was of no use as despite all of his warning students took part in non-cooperation movement.^{iv} That situation had caused a temporary split among the Aryas of Lahore. one segment of Arya was propagating that D.A.V college should not be a part of the Swadeshi movement as it was our nationalistic maneuvering on the other hand second segment was of the opinion that is what Arya Samaj was preparing to infuse a nationalist agitation not only in all Punjab level but aiming all India into its fold. That controversy led debate brought the D.A.V College into prominent notice, and the question was much debated whether it was just an educational institute or harbinger of the revolutionary agitations. Barrier in his paper "The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab,

1894-1908", according to him "during this period the Samaj was probably the most important factor in determining the character and direction of the Punjab Congress." "The Samaj," according to him "served as a training-ground.vThat situation become so tense that by the mid of Swadeshi Movement, it was rumored that government is planning to disaffiliate Arya Schools and the D.A.V. College. On that rumor, college authorities had decided to disconnect their ties with Lala Lajpat Rai.vi

On 24 October, 1920, a meeting of the students of all the colleges of Lahore was held in the Gol Bagh under the chairmanship of Chaudhrani Sarla Devi. Dr Kitchlew made a speech on the desirability of the non-cooperation movement. Because of these speeches, the majority of the students' present pledged to go "in favor of a general strike." About thirty students of the D.A.V. College asked the Principal and Managing Committee" to disaffiliate the college from the government university. They went on strike to meet their demand.vii The Deputy Commissioner warned Lala Hans Raj, Principal of the D.A.V. College. That was a crucial time for the College authorities. As college was not prepared to meet the challenges posed by the authorities. Swadeshi movement with student participation was causing high damage to the functioning of college and its reput was under dire threat. During martial law, Arya Samaj in Lahore had faced multiple challenges. On the one side, it had to secure maximum of its strength from being executed from the martial law authorities. and second as to secure its preceded ideology from being interrupted or corrupted form the radical Arya who were doing politics either from the platform of the D,A,V college or involving young Arya to perpetuate their radical agitation. Authorities at D,A,V College had become aware of the fact that if they want to continue their original scheme to evolve wide spread Samaj not only in the Punjab but all across the India, they had to divert their attention from the ideological breaches on the name of political agitation. Aryas had seriously started thinking of passing a resolution to the effect that all students attending political meetings will be struck off the roll.viii Arya was a socio-religious body and did not want to offend British authorities by getting politically conspicuous. In the result authorities would have obstruct their work.ixOn the first orders under Martial Law was attendance of all students of the D.A.V. College at a roll call held three times a day at the Bradlaugh Hall.

Backward Moving Movement -Split between Politics and Orthodox Ideologues

During and after Swadeshi movement, DAV College and Arya Samaj got huge losses in terms of both reputation and their continued progress. Government had casted a serious concern over its activities on broader level. Strict surveillance by officials had delimited its earlier pace of progress. It had caused another problem in the form of split among DAV authorities. An internecine feud erupted between different sections of Arya Samaj over the role College was supposed to play abiding by the original rules of Arya Samaj. A pro-Arya Newspaper Parkash propagating Arya Political activism, had lamented on the authorities of DAV College on their retreating role in the political premise. It had criticized Lala Hans Raj on not allowing Lalal Lajpat Rai to use college platform for political activism.x

Local authorities had reserved stringent punishments for the D.A.V. College students. Students of the DAV College were the worst sufferer of Martial Law situation. They were not only plunged out of college in large number but also a complete session of students was not able to pass through the exam. The Civil and Military Gazette, while analyzing the results of Punjab University for 1919, in its issue of 25 July 1919, it pointed out that, "The cause of the poor results of the D.A.V. College in the intermediate and for the Bachelor's Degree examination was that "its students notoriously took part in the Lahore disturbances. The result was that rigorous punishments were reserved for D.A.V. College students. Whereas, in the case of students of other colleges, the punishment inflicted by their principals was accepted, in case of D.A.V. College, the Martial Law

authorities were not satisfied with the punishment awarded by the Principal of the D.A.V. College. Thus, martial law authorities had ordered the principal of DAV College to award more strict punishments to his students.^{xi} In that crucial situation college authorities had started to devise new policies to compensate its earlier damages caused by the Swadeshi movement and perpetual boycotts and Hartals by its old and present student's body. Its organ newspapers had started their movement while forcing on the theme to revert to the earlier educational and ideological programs.^{xii} Their main Newspaper Arya Gazette had started a series of articles renouncing the controversial political posture adopted during Swadeshi Movement. It also made clear that college should revert to its religious indoctrinating services which was the main motive of that movement. It also tried to reject the allegation of being disloyal to government.^{xiii}

In that backdrop, college had adopted another strategy to infuse new spirit in its activities. That strategy was two pronged. On the one hand, college authorities had adopted the earlier course of religious and educational services. It had renounced its course of political action. As that course of action had diminished its pace and progress which was going on very smoothly before the advent of Swadeshi movement. In order to reinvigorate the education qualities, college authorities had decided to incorporate many educational reforms on the patterns of American and many western universities. It was being realized that this is the only way to capitalize the long drawn out objectives of the Arya mindset behind establishing the college in the previous century.^{xiv}

Second part of its strategy was its change in previous policy towards mainstream Hinduism and other political parties. For instance, in the initial phase of its activity, College preached the concept of Arya as a new religion, abhorring Hinduism as the nomenclature for their identity. But in new circumstances they started to use the term Hindu for all the sects including themselves. In its golden Jubilee number of D.A.V. College, Daily Milap had published a special issue on D.A.V. College in which the word Hindu was used for all the other mainstream Hindu parties.^{xv} Now they did not have much hesitance to call themselves as Hindus by others. Gokal Chand also used the word Hindus for their own community all across India. In addition, the word Arya was started to be used as an organization not as a different sect.^{xvi}

In order to compensate and reinvigorate themselves College authorities had decided not to take part actively in politics. However, at the same time, they also decided to make relationship with many of other political parties and it was the only way to abolish their self-indifference towards mainstream Hindu community. In that very perspective, Arya had developed closeness only with those parties, which were communal in politics. Because Arya considered that only communal parties could safeguard the interest of Mainstream Hindu community in Punjab. They abhorred the policies and politics of Indian National Congress in Punjab. They were of the opinion that policies adopted by congress in the name of secularism would do much harm to the cause of the Hindus of Punjab. That was the perspective in which we see the close intimacy between Arya Samajists and Sikhs on the pretext of being communal in political approach.^{xvii}

D.A.V. College at the End of Colonial Period

The post Swadeshi situation had casted negatively on the activities of the DAV College. Its authorities had adopted the earlier object set by its founders in the late nineteenth century. However, socio-politics of Punjab had altered a lot and it needed to have much modification in its policies towards its religious brethren including Sikhs. It has to be borne in mind that the Dayanand College has never received the usual grants in aid distributed by the Department of Education every year. It has to depend on the support of the public alone and the falling rate of interest has made this financial support even more necessary. The budget for the year 1936-37, for example, anticipates a deficit of Rs10,732 in the College department alone. It is true every year collections are made at the time of the anniversary of the Arya Samaj, Lahore. But the money collected at the

time is mostly spent either on the capital programme of the Society -providing permanent amenities of various sorts— or distributed among the five non university departments, the Brahma Maha Vidyalaya, the Ayurvedic College, the Industrial School, the Research Department and the Updesh Fund.

The role of DAV College had got diminished outlook by the coming of partition. However, its students were active in many of the activities. Those activities were about the political agitations to the violent acts aiming at threatening the rival community in the city. Many of its former students had left the Arya Samaj and joined the other nationalist parties such as Hindu Mahasabha and Indian National Congress. During the civil disobedience movement in the city of Lahore in the month of January 1947, many students of DAV College were actively involved in waging political agitation against the rival communities. Many students had taken part in the relief activities for the affected person of their own communities. Moreover, during the partition days that college was converted into the Hindu camp. That Hindu Camp was the safe place for those Hindus and Sikhs families who were transferred from the inner localities of the walled city of Lahore and adjoining areas, and were shifted in the premise of that College for the further migration escorted by the military evacuation authorities.xviii

Discussion

The establishment of DAV College was to provide exclusive identity to the nascent community of Dayanand followers in Punjab. Arya followers were in dire need of having a concrete body, which was not developed in the lifetime of Dayanand Saraswati. The larger than life figure of Dayanand Saraswati was in itself powerful enough that it did not felt the need of having an exclusive body for the perpetuation of Arya Samajist in Punjab. In the post-Dayanand phase, however, requirements changed. Subsequently Arya followers, with the back of moneyed classes had decided to establish such institute, which could provide the comprehensive Arya Indoctrinating education to its young generations. The historical purpose of that institute was bringing up a complete generation of Arya followers. Thus, it intended to produce a compact body out of the doctrinal paradigms set by Dayanand Saraswati. However, it is observed that the first breed of Arya generation produced by that educational institute had altered in active politics in close association with many of the national movements.i.e Swadeshi. Involvement of Arya Samajist into that spell of political vigilantism resulted into the strict limitations on the smooth working of DAV College. Those limitations had compromised the actual and intentional purpose behind the establishment of the college, which was to produce a comprehensive generation for Arya Samajist with far wide a purpose to spread all over the north India. Thus, that pre-mature participation of D.A.V activist was resulted into the outburst of its potential with miscalculations. In the immediate after situation authorities of the D.A.V College had decided to alter their whole program by reverting to the previous scheme of indoctrination. That reversion was with some modification and the ground changes had forced them to provide space for the mainstream Hindu community, earlier denied as their co-brethren. Now the college authorities had broadened their scope of ideology by encompassing ‘other’ Hindus and Sikhs with liberal communal biases. However, those broader and liberal policies were not to serve the purpose of college authorities as college had to face a lot hardship in terms of capital accumulations for their annual budget.

The earlier pace of rise was owed to the factor of communitarian biases with doctrinal enthusiasm while accumulating the funds. In the post Swadeshi reforms based policies that enthusiasm was difficult to regain. Moreover, as it was the policy of college authorities not to lend financial assistance from government or any other princely state. Thus, the situation was becoming compromised for the college to run smoothly, as shortage of funds was taking a toll. In the last decade before partition, DAV College was losing its value as a big provider of freedom workers,

as it was doing in the Swadeshi movement or during Martial law rule in Punjab in 1920. It had seen its peak performance when Hindu community of Punjab was in search of developing some strong and unified body. However, that Arya 'body' involved in political vigilantism with subsequent arresting of the very purpose behind the establishment of the College. Thus, it went into low profile in the followed years to come.

Conclusion

The history of DAV College during the Swadeshi movement illustrates how educational institutions could transcend their academic functions to become influential centres of political and ideological mobilization. Although the college was established with the primary objective of promoting modern education alongside the religious ideals of the Arya Samaj, the changing political climate of the early twentieth century gradually transformed it into an important platform for nationalist activity in Punjab.

This study has argued that College served as a crucial institutional bridge between the Arya Samaj's programme of religious and social reform and the emerging politics of Swadeshi nationalism. Through its curriculum, student organizations, public lectures, college publications, and the influence of prominent leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai, the college contributed significantly to the dissemination of economic nationalism and the cultivation of political consciousness among the educated Hindu middle class. In this respect, the institution functioned not merely as a place of learning but as a training ground for a generation of political activists and public leaders.

The increasing involvement of students in nationalist campaigns also exposed tensions within the Arya Samaj itself. While one group, represented by educational administrators such as Lala Hans Raj, sought to preserve the non-political character of the institution, another regarded political participation as a natural extension of the Arya Samaj's reformist mission. These competing visions reflected broader debates within colonial Indian society concerning the relationship between education, religion, and politics. The colonial government's growing surveillance of College further demonstrates that educational institutions were recognized as important centres of political influence. Official suspicion, intelligence monitoring, and periodic threats of administrative action reveal the extent to which the British authorities perceived the college as a significant contributor to nationalist mobilization in Punjab. The experience of College therefore highlights the central role of educational institutions in shaping modern political consciousness in colonial India. Its significance lay not simply in supporting the Swadeshi movement but in providing the organizational, intellectual, and social infrastructure through which nationalist ideas were institutionalized and transmitted to successive generations. The history of College thus offers valuable insights into the intersection of education, religious reform, and anti-colonial politics, demonstrating how institutions of higher learning became active participants in the making of modern Indian nationalism.

References

ⁱ Shiv, 114.

ⁱⁱ Daily Milap, Lahore, 24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue..

ⁱⁱⁱ That in outline is the Punjab disturbances f 1907. The most interesting and controversial question had always been the government conspiracy thesis, which centered on the Lahore based branch of Ary Sammaj. 34 Haily; study in British Imperialism, 1872-1969(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,1987),34..

^{iv} Shivs 92.

^v Barrier in his paper, "The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908," stated that "during this period the Samaj was probably the most important factor in determining the character and direction of the Punjab Congress." "The Samaj," according to him "served as a training-ground".

^{vi} Shiv 104.

^{vii} Ibid,150.

^{viii} Daily Milap,Lahore,24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue.

^{ix} Shiv,92

^x John Whitson Cell, study in British Imperialism, 1872-1969(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,1987),34.

^{xi} Shiv, 216.

^{xii} The Arya Gazette (Lahore), of the 07th January 1910, published a communication from Lala Kanshi Nath, of Dinga Arya headed " The three existing aspects of the Arya Samaj, viz., the Arya publications, the Arya educational institutions, and the Arya Training Colleges."

^{xiii} The Arya Gazette (Lahore), of 8th January,1910, publishes from Lala Ram Parshad, B.A., headed " Is the Arya Samaj a disloyal body ? " The writer says that it is often alleged, and a few Aryas also join in preferring the charge, that the Arya Samaj is weak on its religious side. This is, however, an allegation the truth of which it is desirable to investigate very thoroughly.

^{xiv} Daily Milap Lahore on its special issue on D.A.V College had editorial piece, " In an anonymous writers opinion that the modern American universities are working preferentially on the technical education as that is the only way a civilization can progress in the modern crucial times. Thus, our own college should focus on the same way as the modern American universities are preparing their student bodies. Our college should priorities its policy and planning to infuse in our students not only the modern education, technical understanding but also los make enabled them to cope with the complications of modern civilizations."

^{xv} It was a fact that in the initial phase of their rise, Arya Samaj had shown categorical abhorrence in the nomenclature of the word Hindus. They tend to say that they are not Hindus. Rather they were real vanguard of Vedic civilization, Arya Samaj. Moreover, Orthodox Hindus and mother Hindus sect were not going to accept them as Hindu.

^{xvi} *hindu itne kamzoor kyun hain*,in Daily Milap, Special issue on the golden Jubilee Number on DAV College in 1935.

^{xvii} Daily Milap, Special issue on the golden Jubilee Number on DAV College in 1935.

^{xviii} The college had retained the status of Hindu Camp up to few years after partition as many of the non-Muslims; families were still residing in those camps awaiting their final migration. After their complete exodus, that Hindu cam was converted into the temporary camp for the Muslims migrants from eastern Punjab and other parts of India. Majority of those refugees were from Anbala and UP.