

## ISLAM AND THE ARYA SAMAJ

The religious movement with which Islam in India had to come to grips towards the end of the last century, was that of the Arya Samaj. Originally intended to be a reformative movement in Hinduism, taking as it did its stand on the doctrine of the Unity and Invisibility of the Divine person, it soon adopted an attitude extremely hostile to Islam, possibly with a view to placate the injured susceptibilities of inflexible Hindu mind. Those who have close by studied the Hindu religious outlook know very well that it has a wonderful aptitude for tolerating a new thought, provided it does not made any attempt to extend the intellectual and moral sympathies of the Hindu race beyond the borders of India. The genius in Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Samaj, could not have failed to perceive this peculiarity of the Hindu mind, and hence perhaps his anxiety to show his unbending hostility towards all those creeds that harboured more or less an international outlook in religion. Although Christianity also had to bear the brunt of this neo-Hindu agitation, being the religion of the ruling class it had its privileged protection from the vulgar thrusts of this new outburst of Hindu fanaticism. Suffering a double humiliation of political and economic bondage it was reserved for Islam to face this new onslaught of Hinduism solely with the weapons of brain and heart. The weapons used against Islam by the Samaj had nothing original in them. They were mostly borrowed from the Christian armoury, only dipped in the bitterness of a revived racial fanaticism smarting under a sense of prolonged frustration. The sequel to this bitter struggle, however, has once more proved to those that have witnessed it, that Islam can hold its own even if there be nothing of worldly resources to help it. Defeated in the field of intellectual combat, the Arya Samaj had gradually to change its front and tried to extirpate Islam from this land, where it had lived for one thousand years or more, by an appeal to the race feeling of the millions of Indian Muslims, and a dramatic move to take them back in the religious fold of Hinduism. This happened so late as the twenties of this century and is known as the *Shuddhi Movement*. But like the

intellectual attack this social attack also has failed miserably, in spite of the general depression and indifference of the Muslim world and today we see the Arya Samaj introducing in its own fold and the general Hindu community a series of reforms which, when complete, will leave its allegiance to Hinduism and its sacred scriptures, just a matter of form, and will make it appear for all practical purposes a sect of Islam. The following brief survey of this struggle finally chased the Arya Samaj out of the field of religious controversy, will be read, we hope, with great interest by those anxious to know the strength of Islam as a religion, at this moment, when tired of the conflict of creeds—religious, political, and economic—the saner section of humanity is turning its eyes on this religion as the one that alone can inspire mankind with a new confidence in its destiny.

About a century ago, on the night of Shiva Ratri, a Hindu youth was engaged together with his father in the worship of god Shiva, one of the persons in the Hindu Trinity. Devout offerings were being made to the image of the god. Sweets, fruits and puddings—things that are tempting to the human taste, are also considered as gratifying to the taste of the gods because man-made gods are just reflections of man's own desires and sentiments. Things that are palatable to man—delicious dishes and fruits—are all included in the term of *Deo-bhog* (meals for the gods). So it is that these enjoyable articles of food are offered to the memory of dead forefathers and elders and to the gods. With this traditional belief in mind the worshipper in question had made an earnest offering of these things to the image of Shiva and was hoping confidently that the image would honour the offering with acceptance. But the father's faith in this supposed phenomenon of Divine acceptance was as strong as the son's was weak, the respective ages of the two being responsible for this difference. While the son with faith and scepticism thus struggling in his mind was sitting close to the idol with half-closed eyes, he was put on his guard by an event which created a landmark, so it is said, in the history of his life. He found a mouse enjoying himself at the expense of the delicious articles of

food meant for the god Shiva. This apparently commonplace sight set the youth thinking. Should one worship a thing which is more helpless than even a mouse?—he began to wonder. The story may or may not be an original one. The Holy Qur'an employed a parable very closely resembling this reported incident. It is a well-known parable known to every Muslim and every reader of the Book. It has influenced the lives of many a big reformer of the Hindu religion, and made them renounce the cult of idol-worship, euphemistically called image-worship. Baba Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism in the Punjab, Bhagat Kabir, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Keshab Chandra Sen, the last two being the founders of the Brahma Samaj Movement, are all persons who have been directly or indirectly influenced by the Islamic doctrine of the Unity of Godhead. It is written in the Quran : "Should the fly carry off aught from them, they could not take it back from it; weak are the invoker and the invoked. They have not estimated God with the estimation that is due to Him; most surely God is Strong, Mighty."<sup>40</sup> Mouse is comparatively a bigger creature. A being that cannot protect its gifts from such a small creature as a fly, cannot obviously be expected to help man in any way. On the contrary it needs the help of others for even the slightest movement. On the night of this particular Shiva Ratri, or sometime afterwards, the mind of this youth must have been deeply stirred not by any *mantra* of the Vedas, as there is to be found no such reference to idol-worship in that sacred Scripture—but by this verse of the Holy Quran and he became disgusted with the first principle of current Hinduism, viz., its idolworship. This was the first victory of Islam over Hinduism that was achieved at the hands of Swami Dayanand, the Founder of the Arya Samaj, for the youth in the story was no other than this great figure of Indian history.

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40. The Quran, xxii : 73,74

## THE CASTE SYSTEM

The idea of the Unity of Godhead and the idea of the equality of human beings are indissolubly connected with one another. The Aryans of India were divided into many castes, and they had a plurality of gods. Their ways of salvation were different. The rites and rituals that constituted their religious life were different in fundamental principles as well as in details for different castes and sub-castes. The children born of a Brahmin, of a Kshatriya, a Vaishya, and a Shudra, would adopt the ways of their respective castes, even from their very birth. It was the duty of the Aryan king to force the members of different castes to follow their respective religious rites and rituals. Every happiness of this world and every blessing of the next depended on every one refraining from renouncing at every stage of his life, the path appointed for his caste and adopting that of another. The founder of the Arya Samaj realised the evils of this disintegrating principle and tried to relax the rigours of the caste system, in the same way as he was driven for some time to a fury against the idol-worship of Hinduism by the sight of the helplessness of the idol as given in the story. The vision of the Unity of Godhead which dawned upon him on that night was a faint impression, which though strong enough to make him leave his parental home yet was not strong enough to make him wholly disgusted with the cult of idol-worship and to firmly implant in his mind the idea of Divine Unity. For even a considerable time after this incident he was still found to follow the cult of Shiva, not merely as an ordinary member but as an enthusiastic preacher of it. Similarly, his position with regard to the caste system was not very well defined. This is why the leaders of the Arya Samaj could never agree among themselves on this vital subject. But now after a long time with the establishment of *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* (assembly for the breaking of the caste system) which is only a part of the Arya Samaj movement, the attitude of the Arya Samaj has been having a fresh orientation towards the teachings of Islam. This is the second victory which Islam achieved over the ancient Aryan religion.

## THE IDEA OF TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOULS

The idea of transmigration is among the fundamental beliefs not only of the Arya Samaj but of the Vedic religion itself. This theory purports to say that all the differences in mankind, of race, of nationality, of colour, of language, of condition, economic, physical and mental, have their origin in the good or bad work in a previous life on earth. The aforesaid *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* movement, definitely inspired by the faith of Islam, in so far as it aims at removing the differences of castes, lays an axe, so to speak, at the roots of the theory of transmigration. For the greatest argument advanced by Hinduism in support of the theory of transmigration is that the difference between the condition of one man and another cannot exist by itself nor can it be decreed by God without any reference to the law of *karma* (action). So the theory of transmigration, according to this religion, must be true. But now the Arya Samaj says that the caste distinction is a foolish institution, that all men are born equal. In view of this changed outlook the theory of transmigration must of necessity be regarded a foolish idea too; because a man who has been born a Brahman as a reward for the good deeds of his previous existence cannot be equal to another who has been born in a lower caste, say a Shudra, as a consequence of his evil deeds. To assign an equal position to the son of a Brahman and to that of a Shudra, is an obvious interference in the law of reward and punishment as promulgated by the God of Aryan conception; and this is an unforgivable sin. We Muslims, however, are happy to notice this great change in the Hindu mind. This is a third step of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu political leaders as guided by it, towards the religion of Islam.

## REMARRIAGE OF THE WIDOWS

Swami Dayanand, the Founder of the Arya Samaj, has given his emphatic opinion against the remarriage of widows. He prescribed *Niyoga*, on the authority of the Vedas, as a remedy for the sufferings of this unfortunate class of women. The Arya Samaj, consistently with its principles, has debated in favour of

the moral validity of this obnoxious practice with the Muslim preachers in hundreds of public meetings. Its protagonists have written hundreds of books in support of it. But the power of truth has at last broken down all resistance and today we find the Arya Samaj silently giving up this age-long practice of Hinduism and giving currency to the practice of remarriage of the widows. They find pleasure in calling it *Vedak Riti* (Vedic practice) but in real fact it is an adoption of an Islamic principle. The remarriage of widows is an event of great significance insofar as the Arya Samajist explanation of this extreme helplessness of a woman brought about in this way, is that it is in retribution for her evil deeds in a previous birth. It fulfils a demand of the law of Karma. Thus in the *Satya Yuga* (the age in which truth prevailed) it was impossible for a Brahmin lady to be a widow. The increasing number of widows in this age of sinfulness is in pursuance of the decree of God, the source of all justice. If one challenges the decree, one challenges the law of the transmigration of souls, as upheld by the Arya Samaj. As Muslims we owe a word of appreciation to the Samaj for this courageous step of theirs towards what is right and just.

#### AVERSION FOR NIYOG<sup>41</sup>

The Founder of the Samaj, Swami Dayanand, in his epoch-making work, *Satyarath Prakash*, the Bible of the Arya Samaj, had promulgated the idea of Niyog as a sacred practice. The Arya Samajist writers and speakers had, therefore, to defend and justify it as such with all the resources of their brain. But today one certainly comes across innumerable advertisements for the need of husbands for widows, but no advertisement for the need of Niyog is to be found anywhere. The practice of the Samaj is in direct opposition to the teachings of the master on this question. So much so that Swami Shradhdhanand, one of the high priests of the Arya Samaj, who died only a few years back, was obliged to write that it was a practice suitable to the conditions of the people of the lower

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41. A temporary connection of a woman with a man outside the marriage tie for the sake of procreation.

strata of society and not meant for the upper classes. This amounts to saying that the Arya Scripture, *Satyarath Prakash*, is not meant for the upper and refined classes, insofar as this book considers Niyog to be a very important institution and far from regarding it as bad regards the prevention of its as a sinful act. This attitude of the book towards the practice made it appear, for all practical purposes, as an institution more important than even marriage itself, for it is never considered a sinful act to withhold or refrain from marriage. This is another step of the Samaj towards the standard of purity set up by Islam, taken after 50 years of thinking, and we Muslims congratulate them on this.

### INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE

According to the Vedas, Marriage is valid only within the same caste or *Varna*. Marriage between persons belonging to different castes, is unlawful and the resultant issues being thus illegitimate can have no share in inheritance. The Arya Samaj cannot dispute this position of such marriages. If it departs anywhere from the orthodox view it is with regard to the definition of caste. According to the Samaj, caste is not determined by birth but by the conduct of a person. But this definition becomes impracticable in the matter of marriage. According to the definition of the Samaj, one who reads the Vedas and teaches these sacred books to others, performs *Yajna*, accepts gifts and makes gifts to others, is a Brahmin, no matter if he is a cobbler by birth. Now, according to the principle of Vedic marriage within the same caste, this imaginary Brahmin of the Samaj should be married to a woman with similar or same qualities of head and heart. His marriage with a woman of a different nature whether it be due to birth or conduct should be regarded as forbidden and unlawful. One may perhaps come across such a Brahmin among the male members of the community in the ratio of one to a thousand, but among the female members the ratio may go up to one to a million or even more. Under such circumstances, Brahmins will practically be debarred from marrying in view of Arya Samaj principles laid down above, and if

they are not, the marriages contracted will be invalid. The matter worth considering here is that although, according to the principles of the Vedas, such marriages are irreligious and the resultant issues illegitimate, yet according to Islam these marriages are quite valid and the offspring legitimate. It is for the Arya Samajists to see therefore if thus in actual practice they are following the Vedas or the Islamic Shari'at. Even a man-in-the-street can understand that although in outwards appearance such marriages are solemnized within the temples of the Samaj yet in reality they fall within the jurisdiction of Islamic mosques.

### DIVORCE

The institution of divorce is purely Islamic in origin. We have had to face countless objections from the Hindus and Arya Samajists on the score of this institution. We were told that the provision for divorce was rank injustice to the woman, it was a gateway to adultery; it was a licence to licentiousness and debauchery. We were also told that in the presence of this provision Muslim marriages were a patchwork at its very foundation and were a feeble connection. We had to listen to all these charges with patience and had to reply to them to the best of our ability. But at the end of the Arya Samajists's struggles against Islam extending over half a century, we find the Samaj and the enlightened section of the orthodox Hindus making tremendous efforts to introduce the system of divorce in the Hindu community. They had the Divorce Act passed in the Hindu native states and launched an agitation to have a similar law passed for British Indian Hindus through the Central Legislature. Thus a thing which they could have taken from the Muslims quite in an easy manner, they refused to take. But they are not only not averse to accepting the same from the hands of the Viceroy and the British Indian Government, but even extremely anxious for it. In so doing they have discarded one of the fundamental principles of the Vedic religion and expressed their earnestness to adopt an Islamic principle only with the seal of the Viceroy's authority.

## THE RIGHT OF INTHERITANCE FOR THE HINDU WOMAN

If the difference between the owner and the owned lies in the ones having full right of disposal on one's own earnings, and the others being devoid of such a right, the position of the woman in the Vedic religion is not that of the owner but that of the owned, because unlike the son she can neither inherit the property of the father nor as wife she has any right of disposal over her own earnings in her capacity of a wife. So much so that if a person is survived only by daughters, his property is inherited by an adopted son or failing that by a son by Niyog. It is because of this total deprivation of the woman from all control over wealth that she has been given the epithet of "Nirdhana" in the Hindu Shastras. Thus Yasak Acharya in Nirukt Kand 4, adhyay 2, Shatpath Brahman Kand 4, adhyay 4, Brahman Kand 2, adhyay 13, the woman has been debarred from inheriting any property. In Shatpath Brahman it is clearly written :

"The gods have totally segregated the women from their husbands, and thus segregated they niether possess any soul nor are entitled to any heritage."<sup>41a</sup>

So if the Hindu women themselves or their advocates have raised any voice against this ordinance and if the Hindu religion sought any redress from the Viceroy and his Assembly, it is another triumph of Islam over Hinduism, for it is in Islam alone that the daughters are given the right of inheritance along with the sons, and the wife is given the right of inheriting the property of her husband in the same way as the man is given the right of inheriting the property of his wife, and this even where there are sons to succeed the father.

## CONCLUSION

In view of these bold changes in the Arya Samaj and the Vedic religion, one cannot help feeling that the Hindu nation is passing through that stage of evolution, where the total destruction of the old structure is necessary to make room for a new one. The ancient and unchanging Hindu social structure, which started its life at a point of time in the past, history cannot reach, con-

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41a. Shatpath Br. 4 : 4.2.13.

vulsing with forces of revolution of which Swami Dayanandji, the Founder of the Arya Samaj, was a perfect embodiment. His rage against Islam and its founder was only a crude manifestation of this inner convulsion. It is a pity that the Swamiji was unacquainted with Urdu, Persian and Arabic and had read too much of the prejudiced writings of Christian missionaries on Islam. It is the considered opinion of such devoted disciples of the Swamiji as the late Laia Lajpat Rai and Pandit Nardev Shastri, the late Principal of Jawalapur Kangri, that the life of Swamiji was a series of changes in thought and beliefs. No doubt, he was a successful debater but a debater who would take a new lesson from every debate to create a new belief on its foundations. And it is difficult to say what atmosphere of thoughts and beliefs he would find himself in, had he been alive today. From the manner he grafted several Islamic teachings on to the body of Hindu religion, one would naturally expect him to have grasped and adopted the whole truth of Islam if he were allowed to live a little longer. Be that as it may, we are not without hopes for the Hindu community, to the revival of whom his life was devoted, as the Arya Samaj, which has been carrying his mission forward is faithfully following the line chalked out by him and are courageously introducing Islamic principles of social existence in the majority community of Hindus. We Muslims can only pray that God may crown the efforts of the Samaj with every greater success as the time passes as its successes will pave the way for a new India, of which the official religion will be Islam.