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## The Inner Revolution: Shuddhi and the Reinvention of Hinduism

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**The Inner Revolution: Shuddhi and the Reinvention of Hinduism**

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At first glance, Munshi Ram Vij was one of any thousands of wayward young men who roamed the Punjab province of British India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Born into an orthodox Hindu family of the *kshatriya* (warrior) caste on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1856 in the city of Jalandhar, Munshi Ram was the youngest of the six children of Lala Nanak Chand, a police constable, and spent much of his childhood following his father's postings across the towns of the Punjab. Having shown academic potential in his early schooling, Nanak Chand pushed his son to pursue a college education and a career in law. However, Munshi Ram was a restless spirit. Raised him in orthodox Hinduism, Munshi Ram cast away his faith in disgust after witnessing the corruption of *brahmins* (priests). Attracted for a time to Christianity, Munshi Ram abandoned his intention to convert and declared himself an atheist. His education faltered as he was drawn into drinking and gambling circles. Stirred repeatedly by the passion of his father and devotion of his young wife, Munshi Ram tried again and again to mend his ways but always succumbed to temptation.

Amidst this turmoil in his life, Munshi Ram had a chance encounter with Dayanand Saraswati (1824 – 1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj (Society of Aryans), a religious order established in 1875 that sought to revive what it regarded as the original religion of the *Vedas*. Munshi Ram questioned Dayanand extensively on religious issues, and the sage responded to all. Finally, Munshi Ram admitted to Dayanand that while he could not counter his logic, Dayanand's answers had not given him "real faith." To this, Dayanand replied, "Look, you asked questions, I gave answers... When did I promise that I would make you believe in God? Your

faith in God will only come when the Lord himself makes you a believer.”<sup>1</sup> This encounter started Munshi Ram on a personal journey, studying Dayanand’s treatise, the *Satyarth Prakash* (*The Light of Truth*) as he completed his education in law. In 1884, Munshi Ram converted into the Arya Samaj and abandoned his observance of orthodox rituals. When his father invited his son to participate in an orthodox celebration of *ekadashi*, which included a ceremonial feeding of brahmins, Munshi Ram refused. When tasked by his father to declare if he believed in the Hindu ritual of *ekadashi*, Munshi Ram replied, “I do not consider those you intend to honor with gifts real brahmins and I do not think that *ekadashi* is a special kind of day.”<sup>2</sup> Deeply disappointed, Nanakchand nevertheless let his son practice his new faith, but expressed the greatest sorrow of an orthodox Hindu father when he said, “I do not believe that on my death there will be anybody to offer me water,” a final rite that every Hindu son must offer for the salvation of his father’s spirit.<sup>3</sup> However, as his father’s health declined over the years, Munshi Ram nursed him with great care. Nanakchand was impressed his son’s transformation into a disciplined young man. In his last moments, Nanakchand expressed his desire to have his funeral rites be performed according to the traditions of the Arya Samaj. Although he died before his wishes could be carried out, Munshi Ram performed the *havan* (holy fire) ceremony according to Arya tradition for the peace of his father’s soul.

The account of Munshi Ram Vij’s conversion is a microcosm of a dramatic religious struggle that was being waged both within Hindu society and between Hinduism and other religions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the aftermath of the Indian rebellion of 1857, India had become a Crown colony of the British Empire and the British had introduced a degree of self-

<sup>1</sup> J.T.F. Jordens, *Swami Shradhananda: His Life and Causes* (Bombay: Vidya Bhavan, 1961), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Jordens, *Swami Shradhananda*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

governance through limited voting rights and native representation on local governing councils. Representation was to be assigned according to the proportion of religious communities in the provinces, which would be determined by a population census. However, this policy sparked an intense competition for access to political power amongst India's Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Being one of the largest and most populated provinces, the Punjab was an important theater for this contest, divided as it was between Muslims, who constituted a plurality and large minorities of Hindus and Sikhs. In the Punjab and other parts of India, the Hindus increasingly perceived themselves as facing an existential crisis, at risk of both political disenfranchisement as well as social and religious extinction. Such fears were not groundless; in the 1881 census of the Punjab region, Hindus constituted 43.8 percent of the total population, while Muslims numbered at 47.6 percent; the Sikhs at 8.2 percent and Christians at 0.1 percent. The 1911 Census showed a five percent decline in the Hindu population, which prompted Colonel U.N. Mukherjee, a former Indian officer in the British Indian Army to publish a pamphlet, *Hindus: A Dying Race*, in which he predicted that the Hindu population was on track for extinction by the next two hundred years.<sup>4</sup> By the 1941 census, the last before India's independence, the Muslims constituted a clear majority in the Punjab at 53.2 percent, the Sikhs stood at 14.9 percent, Christians at 1.9 percent while Hindus stood reduced at 29.1 percent, having dropped 14.7 percentage points over 60 years.<sup>5</sup>

However, the alarm over the census was not the only factor contributing to the unrest in Hindu society. The introduction of British-style educational institutions and an industrializing economy had been transforming society. Rural economies were disrupted even as opportunities

<sup>4</sup> Shradddhananda Sanyasi, *Hindu Sanghatan: Saviour of a Dying Race* (Delhi: Arjun Press, 1926), p. 14-15.

<sup>5</sup> Gopal Krishan, Demography of the Punjab 1881 - 1947, *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 11, Issue No. 1, 2004, p. 83.

arose in urban areas, creating tides of rural-to-urban migration.<sup>6</sup> This in turn created a new class of restless youth who found themselves caught between a Westernized, colonial culture of elite Indians and the traditionalism of the masses. These were men like Munshi Ram, who were educated in English and saw the major failings and corruption in traditional societies but felt rootless and lost in the colonial alternative.<sup>7</sup> As lower caste Hindus received educational and employment opportunities, they grew increasingly dissatisfied with the discrimination they faced from orthodox society. The need for the creation of new ‘Hindu’ religious identity and society became clear. However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hindu society had become rigidly structured and segregated into four broad castes and thousands of sub-castes, with inter-marriage and other social intercourse strictly prohibited between upper and lower castes. Unlike Islam and Christianity, Hinduism had no tradition of proselytization in existence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that could induct new converts into their fold. In fact, orthodox Hinduism had been strict in rendering outcaste any Hindu who participated in unclean professions (mostly those which involved contact with flesh) or who converted to another religion. A radical solution was necessary to ensure the survival of a deeply orthodox and hierarchical religion, and the two individuals who provided the solution have already been introduced to us.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Arya Samaj was sometimes mistaken for a distinct religion as its foundational teachings sharply contradicted popular and orthodox Hinduism. Although rooted in the *Vedas*, the four central scriptures of Hinduism, the Arya faith denounced idol worship, polytheism and the hierarchy of thousands of castes and subcastes that had come to define

<sup>6</sup> Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, “Introduction: The Many Meanings of Religious Conversion on the Indian Subcontinent,” in Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, ed., *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations and Meanings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1976), p. 313-314.

Hinduism. Dayananda Saraswati argued that the original religion established by the *Vedas* was monotheistic, forbade idol worship and recognized only four occupational castes, entry into whom was determined not by birth but ability. Joining the Arya Samaj did not require renunciation of any other creed, merely acceptance of the Ten Principles of the Samaj. Although greeted with antagonism by orthodox Hindus, Christians and Muslims, Dayananda's vision assuaged the concerns of many who were deeply concerned by caste inequality and simplified the message and social hierarchy of Hinduism. In contrast to the brahminical dominance in Hinduism, Dayananda rejected the notion that brahmins were "intermediaries" between God and humanity.<sup>8</sup> For Dayananda and its adherents, the Arya Samaj was not a new religion but the original and pure Hindu religion, which had been corrupted over the centuries. Dayananda and the Aryas saw their mission as rescuing and reviving the true faith from both the corruption of orthodoxy as well as the threats from other religions. Thus, the population crisis faced by Hindu society also concerned Dayananda and the Aryas. In response, Dayananda revived and reinstated the ancient tradition of *shuddhi* (purification), which had been used in previous centuries to "purify" and readmit Hindus who had been converted to Islam or been involved in practices considered "impure" by their caste order. With *shuddhi*, Dayananda sought not only to "reconvert" any Hindus converted to Christianity or Islam, but, in a revolutionary departure from orthodoxy, also to convert Muslims and Christians who had never been Hindus. This radical reinvention of *shuddhi* might have died with Dayananda in 1883 but for the newest Arya convert, Munshi Ram Vij. Taking the Hindu vow of ascetism in 1917, Munshi Ram Vij became a *sanyasi* (monk) and took a new name, Swami Shraddhananda. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until his

<sup>8</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 11.

assassination in 1926, Shraddhananda established a nationwide *shuddhi* movement, seeking to reconvert Hindus who had been converted to other religions, purify outcaste “untouchables” and restore them to their original caste and win fresh converts to Hinduism from other religions.<sup>9</sup>

The history of the *Shuddhi* movement is a prisoner of other histories. The movement is rarely examined as a Hindu quest for a new identity and as a potential remedy for social ills and more frequently regarded as merely a symptom of a social and political maladies. The traditional historiography of the *Shuddhi* movement has analyzed it through three distinct perspectives. The first ascribes it as a product of British colonialism on religion in India; triggered by the census and the introduction of mass democracy, *shuddhi* is reduced as a reactionary device affecting the overarching issue of inter-religious peace, which remained a constant challenge for the British Raj.<sup>10</sup> Conversion to Hinduism was seen as construct not only of Hindu political figures but of the policies of British colonial administrators and activities of Christian missionaries who influenced its design.<sup>11</sup> This perspective presents *shuddhi* as a Hindu ‘extremist’ contribution to the broader communal conflict in India. The second historiographical tradition emerges from the study of identity construction and social emancipation in this period in British India that focused on the native quest for liberation from caste oppression by the means of universalist religions such as Christianity and Islam. For this tradition, *shuddhi* is a purely political strategy adopted by the Hindu nationalist movement to consolidate Hindu society and counter the growth and

<sup>9</sup> Pandit Harikishan Kaul, "Punjab: Part I, Report," in *Census of India, 1911, Volume XIV* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1912), p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth W. Jones, "Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (November 1968), p. 39-51.

<sup>11</sup> Yoginder Sikand, "Arya *Shuddhi* and Muslim *Tabligh*: Muslim Reactions to Arya Samaj Proselytization (1923 – 1930)," in Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, ed., *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations and Meanings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 100.



political influence of Islam and Christianity.<sup>12</sup> The development of *shuddhi* by the Arya Samaj is seen as inspired by and as a reaction to Christian proselytization.<sup>13</sup> This school focuses almost exclusively on the issues of political strategy and political actors, leaving no room for considering social and religious transformation of Hinduism that was taking place both on a societal level and within Hindu families, as witnessed by the account of Munshi Ram Vij's conversion. The third perspective defends the movement in apologetic and often hagiographic terms and is primarily authored by participants and supporters of the movement.<sup>14</sup> However, to regard the question of conversions to Hinduism in these purely reactionary and political terms is to ignore an entire potential history of socioreligious renaissance and reorganization.

The *Shuddhi* movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a religious revolutionary movement that aimed to intrinsically restructure and transform the Hinduism and Hindu society into a more socially equalized and religiously universal system. It was a quest to reconstruct Hindu religious and social identity in response to socioeconomic modernism. The first phase of the movement lasted from the 1880s to the late 1910s and was defined by a persistent struggle with orthodox society to transform Hinduism by opening its doors to induct and assimilate returning and new converts. Here, the religious argument of *Shuddhi* is conditioned to dismantle orthodox restrictions to conversion and to build new institutions of entry and integration into Hindu society. The second phase of *Shuddhi* began in the early 1920s with the emergence of a consensus between the orthodox and the Arya-led reformers, who expanded the *Shuddhi*

<sup>12</sup> Iris Vandeveld, "Reconversion to Hinduism: A Hindu Nationalist Reaction Against Conversion to Christianity and Islam," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (April 2011), p. 31-50.

<sup>13</sup> Sikand, p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Lajpat Rai, *A History of the Arya Samaj: An Account of Its Origin, Doctrines and Activities, with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1967).

movement to confront the challenges presented by Islam and Christianity. Although this phase witnesses greater politicization, the religious argument of Shraddhananda's *Shuddhi* campaign aimed to reconstruct Hinduism as a universal religion. However, Shraddhananda's assassination in 1926 led to a slowdown in the campaign, and its second phase can be argued as having ended in 1947. Political events and forces repeatedly caused the *shuddhi* movement to modify its strategies and goals but remained external forces and did not alter the religious purpose of the *shuddhi* movement until after Shraddhananda's death.

The first phase of the *shuddhi* movement was defined by the conflict between the Arya Samaj, which led the *shuddhi* campaigns in the Punjab and expanded it across northern India, and orthodox Hindu society, which staunchly opposed the re-assimilation of the newly 'purified.' In this period, the *shuddhi* movement facilitated the religious reconstruction of Hindu society and established Aryaism as the unifying superstructure of Hindu theology and tradition. By breaking down barriers to both assimilation and re-assimilation, the *shuddhi* movement fought to establish that a 'purified' Hindu, whether an outcaste being reintegrated or a newcomer entering Hinduism, became the equal of the 'orthodox' Hindu immediately after undergoing purification. The acceptance and integration of the 'purified' peoples was also presented as a religious duty of orthodox Hindu society, strengthening the salvation of the community.

The instrument of *shuddhi* had been developed in ancient India to re-assimilate those Hindus who had been rendered ritually "impure" by practices considered impure or due to contact with non-Vedic peoples. The term *shuddhi* is a Sanskrit word that literally means "purification." Vedic scripture such as the *Atharvaveda* and the describe special rites to "re-admit anyone fallen outside the pale of orthodox Aryan society, making him capable of studying

the Vedas and eligible for social intercourse with the Aryas.”<sup>15</sup> The first major historical crisis that threatened Hindu society with the problem of conversions to foreign religions had occurred in the aftermath of the Arab invasion of Sindh between 710 and 715 CE, in which Arab Muslim armies oversaw mass conversions of Hindus to Islam. It was during this time that the Sanskrit text, the *Devalasmriti*, was composed and specifically addressed the problem of re-assimilating Hindus who had been converted to other religions.<sup>16</sup> The text devised an elaborate ritual of purification and penance, the completion of which reinstated a Hindu into their former caste community. The Arab chronicler Biladuri observed that after the Arab Muslim armies retreated, most of the Hindus converted to Islam in this period had “returned to idolatry.”<sup>17</sup> Those Muslims who had settled in India were also eventually assimilated into Hindu society. The English historian Sir Denison Ross stated that “they [Muslims] were in such small numbers that they were gradually merged into Hindu population. In Mansura (the capital of Sind) they actually adopted Hinduism.”<sup>18 19</sup>

By using *shuddhi* to induct Muslims, Christians and Hindu outcastes into the Hindu fold as equals, Dayananda reinvented *shuddhi* to incorporate the principle of assimilation and acculturation that had been a foundational element in the construction of the Hindu religion and society.<sup>20</sup> In ancient India, this process had been carried about by Brahmin priests who established close ties and “mutually supportive relationships” with warrior chieftains of tribes

<sup>15</sup> J.T.F. Jordens, "Reconversion to Hinduism, The Shuddhi of the Arya Samaj," in G.A. Oddie, ed., *Religion in South Asia* (Delhi: Manohar, 1977), p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture, Sir William Meyer Lectures, 1938-39* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989), p. 67; Jordens, *Reconversion*, p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Bhandarkar, p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Yoginder Sikand and Manjari Katju, "Mass Conversions to Hinduism among Indian Muslims," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 34 (Aug. 20, 1994), pp. 2214.

either indigenous but non-Aryan or those that had newly arrived and settled in the Indian subcontinent. Disseminating knowledge of Vedic rituals and teachings, the Brahmins established the chiefs and the warriors as the *kshatriya* (warrior and princely) caste and assumed for themselves the role and duties of the priestly order. The remainder were assimilated as per their occupation into the *vaishya* (merchant and trader) caste and the *shudra* (farmer and laborer) caste. This process of assimilation enabled Hinduism to absorb into itself many foreign tribes and peoples, including the ancient Greeks, the Kushans, the Huns and the Scythians.<sup>21</sup> It did not fit the definition of a religion “conversion” as “non-Hindus admitted into the Hindu caste system were not required to accept any particular set of beliefs and customs as a pre-condition.”<sup>22</sup> However, Dayananda’s *shuddhi* process added major religious innovations in contrast to the caste and orthodox confines of traditional Hinduism. The ‘Ten Principles’ of the Samaj, the simplicity of its monotheism and its incorporation of the principles of human equality made it attractive to those either attracted to Hindu culture and religion or seeking to be restored as equals in Hindu society. Shradhananda laid the foundation for creating a universalist appeal and a global mission for Hinduism when he argued that “the structures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are based on Zoroastrianism which preceded them in time... [and] in fact Zoroastrianism was nothing but a corrupt version of the Vedic religion. Various arguments were used [by Shradhananda] to prove this assertion such as: old Parsee names were derived from the Vedas; the Avesta mentions the Vedas, Sanskrit was the origin of the language of the Avesta; the latter refers to Vedic heroes and sages, and even to puranic deities.”<sup>23</sup> This religious doctrine, while contestable on the authenticity of its own reading of religious histories, offers an important

<sup>21</sup> Bhandarkar, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> Sikand and Katju, p. 2214.

<sup>23</sup> Jordens, *Swami Shradhananda*, p. 101.

insight into the evolving message and purposes of *Shuddhi*. In contrast to the political doctrine of *Hindutva* advocated by Savarkar, Shradhdhananda is asserting the principal of universal origins for the Hindu religion. By describing the religion of Zoroastrianism, which in turn inspired Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as a “corruption” of the Vedic religion, Shradhdhananda is both laying the theological foundations justifying the doctrine of “purification” of those following “corrupt” paths into the “pure” religion, while simultaneously rejecting the boundaries of national and political identity as exclusionary mechanisms.

The intense religious struggle underway in the Punjab provided the ideal setting for the launch of the Arya Samaj’s *shuddhi* movement. While Dayananda Saraswati had performed the *shuddhi* of a small number of people before his death in 1883, the task of establishing a campaign fell to the local and provincial branches of the Samaj in Punjab. However, when these branches of the Arya Samaj began officiating *shuddhi* ceremonies for outcastes and converted Hindus, not only did local orthodox Hindus refuse to accept the purified individuals but threatened to excommunicate the Aryas as outcaste from their own communities. Orthodox Hindus were deeply suspicious of the reinvention and expansion of the concept of *shuddhi*, believing that it distorted social and religious traditions. Lay orthodox Hindus were also apprehensive about losing their social dominance by having to share their caste status with hitherto outcaste peoples. While urban and educated Hindus were increasingly conscious of the decline of the Hindu population, rural elites were either ignorant of the census and its consequences or indifferent to the bigger picture. The rural elites were also deeply resistant to changes that alleviated or equated the social status of those they had for centuries considered their inferiors. The Aryas were also confronted with a grave problem in that their own social, economic and personal lives still depended on the *biradari* (brotherhood) of their caste

communities, to which they still belonged and relied upon for social relationships, marriages, friendships and economic activities.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, the Arya Samaj made strenuous efforts to court, cajole and even coerce Hindu orthodox leaders into accepting and approving the *shuddhi* campaign. In 1886, orthodox Hindu leaders in Jalandhar threatened to outcaste all members of the Jalandhar Arya Samaj and sought to convene a *panchayat* (public meeting of community leaders) of Jalandhar's Brahmin priests to issue the declaration. The crisis was averted when Shraddhananda and his fellow Arya Samaj leader Devraj threatened to expose the corrupt practices of several senior orthodox priests of Jalandhar, which led to their non-participation in the *panchayat*.<sup>25</sup> The remaining orthodox opponents of the Arya Samaj later organized themselves into the Puranik Dharma Sabha and continued efforts to oppose the *shuddhi* work of the Aryas.<sup>26</sup> The *shuddhi* movement was compelled to work locally in order to overcome trenchant opposition and facilitate a religious transformation. In the city of Amritsar, the Arya Samaj crucially won over the most influential orthodox cleric, Tulsi Ram, who approved of the *shuddhi* ceremony and issued "purification letters" to the purified individuals, who traveled to the Hindu holy city of Haridwar to take a ritual dip in the holy river, the Ganges, to complete their purification.<sup>27</sup> This modification of the *shuddhi* ritual contradicted Dayananda's essential teachings, which regarded the reverence of physical objects, whether idols or rivers, as idolatry. The compromise reveals the necessity the Arya Samaj always felt of winning the support of orthodox Hindu society for the *shuddhi*

<sup>24</sup> Jordens, *Reconversion*, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> Jordens, *Swami Shradhananda*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Jordens, *Reconversion*, p. 149.

campaign. The Arya objective was to reconstruct a more equalized and unified Hindu society; it did not want to separate or be separated from the mainstream Hindus.

The missionary work of the Arya Samaj was carried out through a systematic and organized campaign that invested years in the propagation of the Arya message from village-to-village, organizing inter-caste community gatherings to preach and win adherents. By 1893, the Arya Samaj had become powerful enough to reconfigure the *shuddhi* ceremony entirely according to Dayananda's emphasis on simplicity, uniformity and the absence of excessive ritualism. Removing the obligatory dip in the Ganges, the Arya Samaj instituted a ceremony that involved the "the shaving of the head, *havan* (holy fire), explanation of the *Gayatri* (sacred Vedic *mantra*), investiture of the holy thread where applicable, explanation of the Samaj duties, and finally distribution of *sherbet* by the converts to all present."<sup>28</sup> At times, a certificate of *shuddhi* was issued to ensure the re-opening of social intercourse with caste Hindus.<sup>29</sup> The purification ceremony was performed in a gathering of all local community and caste members in order to acknowledge and confirm that there was complete acceptance of the act of purification and to ensure that purification would be followed by the implementation of integration and that all social boycotts would end.

As the purification campaign progressed in winning adherents and building consensus, the Arya Samaj sponsored the creation of special community organizations to keep the purified community united and organized and to serve their interests. In his record of the campaign to purify the Meghs, a caste community of menial workers, the Punjabi Arya and Hindu political

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Lajpat Rai, *A History of the Arya Samaj: An Account of Its Origin, Doctrines and Activities, with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1967), p. 121.

leader, Lajpat Rai, recounted the creation of a “special organization... to look after their education, etc., called the Megh Udhar Sabha (Society for the Uplift of Meghs), which maintains a Central School and several primary schools.”<sup>30</sup> The Sialkot Arya Samaj established a new housing colony for the Meghs, dug wells to provide permanent clean water supply and constructed a dedicated hospital. They also established local community assemblies, composed of the most educated and religious Meghs, who would serve as community leaders and impart religious instruction: “the “Arya Bhagats,” the designation of the purified Meghs, would lead a paternally-directed life under the tutelage of their enlightened Arya brethren.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, the purification process was followed by an elaborate and continuous effort to socially and economically uplift the purified peoples and to preserve and consolidate the newly Hinduized community within the order of Hinduism.

However, the Arya Samaj was still at times forced to backtrack on its core religious objectives and modify its *shuddhi* campaign to refrain from purifying those outcaste communities considered “too impure” by the local upper-caste elites. This is exemplified in the case of the *shuddhi* of the Kabirpanthi sect, members of the untouchable Chamar caste in 1909. The orthodox Sanathan Dharma Sabha of Hoshiarpur actively mobilized public opinion against the Hoshiarpur branch of the Arya Samaj and succeeded in excommunicating them for several years.<sup>32</sup> While the excommunication ultimately failed, and both the Aryas and the Chamars were reintegrated into the Hindu community, the Arya Samaj was thenceforth reluctant to attempt the *shuddhi* of untouchable communities where it perceived the local upper-caste sentiment to be too hostile. In his *History of the Arya Samaj*, Lajpat Rai noted that receptiveness and resistance to

<sup>30</sup> Rai, p. 126.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 307-308.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308-309.



integration with the purified communities continued to vary across urban-rural lines as well as regionally: “In Lahore and some other places we find that high caste Hindus have no scruples in sending their children to the schools which we maintain mainly for the depressed classes. The children mix quite freely and on equal terms. In the [United Provinces], the home of Hindu orthodoxy, the work is more difficult...”<sup>33</sup> Rural orthodox elites resisted breaking caste barriers that would equalize them with those they had long regarded as their inferiors. Nevertheless, Rai noted a degree of success in purifying the Dome caste of “untouchables” into the Arya Samaj in the United Provinces.

It was the arrival of a political controversy that enabled the Aryas to break the opposition of Hindu orthodoxy. On November 12, 1910 *The Tribune* published the “Gait Circular,” which was a note from E.A. Gait, the British official serving as the Commissioner of the Census, that stated: “... the complaint has often been made that the Census returns of Hindus are misleading, as they include millions of people who are not really Hindus at all.”<sup>34</sup> The Circular argued that outcaste communities should not be counted as Hindus and should be listed separately in a special table, although they would still be counted as Hindus in the general tables of the census.<sup>35</sup> Hindu community and religious leaders, both orthodox and Arya, reacted to this policy as a deliberate attempt to diminish the numerical strength of Hindus. Past reclassifications had served to reduce the numbers of Hindus, especially when the 1871 Census stopped classifying Sikhs as Hindus and decreed them as a separate religious community. Hindu leaders believed that the latest reclassification attempt was the result of the lobbying of the Viceroy by leaders of the All-India Muslim League, the largest Muslim political party in the country, who had argued that

<sup>33</sup> Rai, p. 127.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 305-306.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

“outcastes were not Hindus and should not be considered as such for any purpose.”<sup>36</sup> (Hindu leadership interpreted the Gait Circular as the British government accepting the Muslim argument; further, they recognized that separating outcaste communities would not only reduce the Hindu population and diminish its proportional claim to representation in councils, but the Muslim representation would be strengthened in comparison. Further, the reclassification would create a new population vulnerable to Islamic and Christian proselytization. As a result, orthodox Hindu leaders and their organizations began to recognize *shuddhi* as essential to the defense of Hinduism and the religious and political interests of the Hindu community across India. The *Arya Patrika*, the official publication of the Arya Samaj, noted with satisfaction that the “oracle of Hindu Society,” the orthodox Hindu leaders and organizations had firmly asserted “in bold and unambiguous terms that the Depressed Classes are part and parcel of the Hindu body politic... The penitent convert is no longer kept at an arm’s length. He is taken back into the bosom of the mother religion.”<sup>37</sup>

Following the Gait Circular uproar, Arya Samaj and orthodox Hindu leaders from the Punjab and the United Provinces began to work together to organize the *shuddhi* movement for the first time on an all-India basis. The first All India Shuddhi Conference was held in the city of Allahabad (now Prayagraj) in the United Provinces, with senior Arya leaders Swami Shradhdhananda, Ram Bhaj Datta and Sarda Charan Mitra attending the meeting, and the Conference resolved to establish the All India Shuddhi Sabha on June 23, 1911. Both at the Conference and at the inaugural meeting of the new Sabha, it was declared “that it is desirable and necessary to admit in the fold of Hinduism those non-Hindus who desire to be admitted after

<sup>36</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 305-306.

<sup>37</sup> *Arya Patrika*, January 14, 1911, SPVP 1911, p. 83.

the performance of *Prayaschitta* and *Homa*.”<sup>38</sup> However, the new organization was still a coalition of mixed interests, with some members seeking only to stem the decline in the Hindu population while others believed in actively propagating the Hindu religion to all the people of India. As a result of the reinvigorated *Shuddhi* campaign, the number of Aryas in the United Provinces increased from 25,458 in the 1891 census, to 65,572 in 1901 to 131,638 by 1911.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the Arya reinvention of Hinduism appealed to many upper-caste Hindus as well, with many different communities such as the Ahirs, Lodhas, Rajputs, Baniyas, Brahmins, Kayasths and Jats joining the ranks of the Arya Samaj.<sup>40</sup> By the turn of the century, the Arya Samaj also expanded its operations into the province of Sindh (now in Pakistan). In 1905, the Sukkur branch of the Arya Samaj performed the purification of the Sheikh community of Larkana city; low-caste and Muslim, the Sheikhs were successfully reintegrated into Hindu society.<sup>41</sup> Expanding into the then-princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Arya population there rose from 79 in 1901 to 1,047 by 1911 and reached 23,116 by 1921.<sup>42</sup> The extension of the Megh upliftment campaign to Kashmir significantly bolstered the numbers of Arya Hindus and branched off in 1913 into a campaign to purify the Basith community, which added 9,000 people to the ranks of the Aryas by the end of the decade.<sup>43</sup> Special *shuddhi* campaigns were aimed at purifying and reintegrating upper caste, *kshatriya* communities that had converted to Islam several centuries ago. The status of the *kshatriya* as the warrior caste remained significant in Hindu society even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the return of *kshatriyas* into the fold of Hinduism

<sup>38</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 307.

<sup>39</sup> E.A.H. Blunt, "United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Part I, Report," in *Census of India, 1911, Volume XV* (Allahabad: Government Press 1912), p. 105, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 360.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 303.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 311.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

bolstered both the numbers of Hindus as well as their social prestige and morale.<sup>44</sup> Organizing the Rajput Shuddhi Sabha (Assembly), the Arya Samaj converted 1,052 Muslim Rajputs to Hinduism between 1907 and 1910.<sup>45</sup> The campaigns to purify Rajput communities extended into the princely state of Baroda and the Central Provinces. In this period, the Arya Samaj also began generally proselytizing to and winning converts from Muslims and Christians across caste lines.

The success of the *Shuddhi* movement created fresh problems for the Arya Samaj in terms of achieving complete religious and social integration of the purified into Hindu society, which relied upon caste as its central identity and agency for social intercourse. For those purified individuals who had been born Hindu and had been converted to another religion, the matter was simpler as they were received into their old caste identity. This was most successfully achieved in the case of Rajputs, who were assimilated into the higher caste echelons. However, the Arya Samaj faced a dilemma in the case of the new converts won from Christianity and Islam, who had no Hindu genealogy and caste origin. These converts could only rely upon the Arya Samaj as their gateway to social intercourse with Hindus; at the same time, Hindus members of the Arya Samaj were largely still members of their original caste communities, and thus, were averse to establishing any deep social relationship or marriages with the new converts as they feared excommunication.<sup>46</sup> This problem was the subject of intense debate and protest in meetings of the Samaj through the 1880s and the 1890s, with radical members arguing that any failure to fully integrate non-Hindu converts would be to fail the teachings and ideals of Dayananda.<sup>47</sup> These radical members created the Arya Bhratri Sabha (Arya Brotherhood

<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 304.

<sup>45</sup> Blunt, p. 134.

<sup>46</sup> Jordens, *Reconversion*, p. 155.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Assembly), which argued that the full integration of new converts required the Arya Samaj effectively taking on the functions of a caste by establishing, encouraging and facilitating inter-marriage between Aryas.<sup>48</sup> However, this proposal was opposed by a majority of the Arya community, which argued that Dayananda had envisioned the Samaj as a movement to reform Hinduism and Hindu society in its entirety and not restrict or diminish itself into simply becoming a new caste community.<sup>49</sup> Although the question of integration was never properly resolved, leaving new converts reliant upon the Samaj for their social interactions, the radical wing of the Samaj played an important role in expanding the *Shuddhi* movement in the succeeding decades.

As the *shuddhi* movement became increasingly successful in restructuring the religious foundations of Hindu society with the re-assimilation of purified peoples, its second phase was defined by an increasing politicization caused by religious tensions and violent confrontations with the Islamic and Christian religions. While carefully avoiding direct politicization, Shradhdhananda reshaped the movement to construct greater Hindu social and religious solidarity and to elevate a more universalist and intensive *shuddhi* campaign in direct competition with Islam and Christianity. What had hitherto been an Arya Samaj-centric movement now diversified and established mass mobilization organizations to expand *shuddhi* campaigns faster and achieve deeper transformation. Once again, political events triggered a religious transformation in Hindu society. In August 1921, the Moplah Muslims of the Malabar region of south India launched an anti-British and anti-Hindu rebellion that claimed the lives of thousands of people, with several

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Reconversion*, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

hundred Hindus forcibly converted to Islam.<sup>50</sup> The riot proved to be a watershed moment in the history of Hinduism as more Hindus considered political cooperation with Muslims impossible and saw the necessity of articulating a uniquely Hindu political identity. The politicization of the Hindu identity was facilitated by the British authorities. The 1911 Census report on the United Provinces defined “Hindu” as a racial, social and religious identity.<sup>51</sup> The British author of the census report, E.A.H. Blunt, wrote that a Hindu is “a native of India” who is not of any traceable “foreign descent,” and who belongs to a “recognized caste” and abides by the “spiritual authority of Brahmans.”<sup>52</sup> Blunt went on to say that “Hinduism is essentially indefinite, and to define the indefinite is a contradiction in terms.”<sup>53</sup> Having failed to define the religion of Hinduism, Blunt improvised a working definition of a Hindu, for which he naturally resorted to racial and national criteria, which in turn bolstered the construction of a racial-national “Hindu” identity by Hindu nationalists. In 1923, the Hindu nationalist politician, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883 – 1966) penned the pamphlet *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* defining the ideology of Hindutva (Hindu-ness), defines the ideological project of Hindu nationalism as purely “political” and definitely not religious or theological in nature. For Savarkar, a “Hindu” is a racial and national identity of the one who accepts that his or her ancestors were Hindus and regards “undivided India” (the Indian subcontinent, including Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh) as both a “motherland” and a “holy land.”<sup>54</sup> Himself an atheist, Savarkar contended that a “Hindu” could practice any religion of Indian origin, whether it be Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism or Buddhism, or none at all. In contrast

<sup>50</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People and the Empire* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2008), p. 239-240.

<sup>51</sup> Blunt, p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Blunt, p. 119.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Anderson and Shridhar Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Delhi: Penguin Random House India, 1987), p. 33-40.

to Dayananda Saraswati and Shradhananda, Savarkar asserted that no belief in the Vedas was required to be Hindu.<sup>55</sup> What was necessary was the “blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers.”<sup>56</sup> The religions excluded from this definition were foreign in origin – namely, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. The direct implication of Savarkar’s ideology was that only Hindus could be considered the true citizens of India, with non-Hindus relegated to second-class status. Savarkar’s ideology was adopted as the creed of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteers Union, RSS), a militant Hindu nationalist organization formed in 1925. The second chief of the RSS, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, demanded that non-Hindus either assimilate completely or take an inferior status:

The foreign races in Hindusthan [India] must either adopt Hindu culture and language, must learn and respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but of those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture ... In a word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizens' rights.<sup>57</sup>

When writing of “foreign races” having to “adopt Hindu culture and language,” Golwalkar did not propose a cultural assimilation taking place through the by then well-defined *shuddhi* process. Rather, both Savarkar and Golwalkar were building upon the actual racialist definition of “Hindu” as first proposed by E.A.H. Blunt in the 1911 census. This is demonstrated, firstly, by the fact that adherents of non-Vedic religions such as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism were being co-opted into the Hindu identity. Secondly, Golwalkar’s writings revealed a glowing

<sup>55</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Sahitya Sadan, 1989), p. 81.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>57</sup> Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Bangalore: Bharat Prakashan, 1945), p. 62.

admiration of the racialist policy of Nazi Germany, whom Golwalkar lauded for “purging the country of the Semitic Races” and demonstrating “race pride at its highest.”<sup>58</sup> Savarkar and Golwalkar advocated *shuddhi* for the purpose of building a Hindu majority large enough to establish a Hindu state in India, not to reinvent Hinduism as an equalized and universalistic religion and society.

Although Shradhananda had grown considerably more suspicious of Muslim politicians and religious organizations in the aftermath of the Moplah rebellion, there is considerable evidence that his thoughts were evolving in a completely different direction from those of Savarkar and Golwalkar. Shortly before his assassination in 1926, Shradhananda published his seminal work on the subject of *shuddhi*, which he titled *Hindu Sanghathan: Savior of a Dying Race*. Shradhananda extensively discusses the reasons for the decline of the Hindu population. In a section specifically analyzing the region of Bengal, Shradhananda observes that Islam had been successful in proselytizing as “the inhabitants had never been fully Hinduised... They were spurned by the high class Hindus as unclean and so listened readily to the preachings of the Mullahs who proclaimed that all men are equal in the sight of Allah...”<sup>59</sup> What is observable in this passage is that Shradhananda is criticizing the Hindu community itself, firstly for not being attentive to the task of integrating their community by “Hinduizing” the peoples of eastern and northern Bengal, and secondly, for castigating fellow Hindus as “unclean” and being unsympathetic to their aspiration of equality and dignity, which Shradhananda concedes is provided to them by the theology of Islam. Shradhananda’s candor regarding the appeal of Islam is accompanied by a critique of Hindu attitudes and social practices that contributed to

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>59</sup> Sanyasi, p. 16-17.



their own weakness and decline. However, there is another reason that the comparison to Islam is significant – Shraddhananda seeks for Hinduism to develop the same kind theological and social instruments that built for Islam a strong and expanding religious community. It is in this nuanced light, that Shraddhananda is consistently different and at a distance from the objectives of Hindu nationalist political thought. In his treatise, Shraddhananda offered a different, more explicitly theological doctrine that served as the foundation of the *shuddhi* movement:

The salvation of the community depends upon common action taken by the Hindu Samaj as a whole, but individual salvation is the lookout of individuals. Theoretical Dharma is connected with individual salvation, and therefore, there is room for Theists, Pantheists, Henotheists and even Atheists in the broad lap of the organized Hindu Samaj. But the code of practical Dharma has to do with the community as a whole and, therefore here the plea of individual Dharma should not be allowed to prevail, nor should it hamper the efforts of the organized Hindu Samaj towards national salvation.<sup>60</sup>

Shraddhananda thus confirmed that unlike conversion to Christianity and Islam, the emphasis of *Shuddhi* is not exclusively on individual salvation or “inner change,” which Shraddhananda asserted could be pursued through varied theological and non-theological traditions and is largely left upon the inclinations and endeavors of the individual in question. However, Shraddhananda extended the theological concept and pursuit of salvation to construct the concept of a collective salvation. Shraddhananda presented the doctrine of *shuddhi* as the opposite of conversion in Islam and Christianity by placing collective salvation as equally important to the salvation of the individual. In other words, the fulfillment of the practical religious duties (*dharma*) is facilitated

<sup>60</sup> Sanyasi, p. 189.

not only by the conscience of individuals but by the strength of the collective, the religious community. According to Shraddhananda, one cannot exclusively pursue salvation as an individual project; it is accompanied by the fulfillment of ritual duties and responsibilities towards broader society, which in turn, requires strong religious adherence to duty and organization within that society. Thus, to pursue *shuddhi* is one of the many solutions necessary to rejuvenate and strengthen the Hindu community. This double-edged message was aimed towards orthodox Hindus, who were charged with the responsibility of transforming themselves by ridding their prejudices of caste and religion that had caused the exit of low-caste Hindus to other religions. *Shuddhi* thus became not only the ‘purification’ of the ‘impure’ outcaste and non-Hindu foreigner, but the ‘purification’ of the hearts and minds of the orthodox, and the strengthening of Hindu society as a whole.

This new philosophy of *shuddhi* is exemplified by the nature of the *shuddhi* campaigns undertaken by the Arya Samaj and the *Shuddhi* Sabhas working under Shraddhananda’s supervision. In the aftermath of the Moplah riots, the Arya Samaj played a critical role in aiding the forcibly converted Hindus, who found themselves excommunicated from their castes. Sending a mission to Malabar, the Arya Samaj carefully cultivated the orthodox Hindu leadership to convince them to perform the *shuddhi* of the afflicted Hindus. The Samaj raised a fund of 45,000 rupees to provide food supplies and rehabilitate the Hindus displaced by the violence. Convincing the Raja of Calicut to convene an assembly of Nambudiri caste priests, the Arya Samaj carefully established an agreement to perform *shuddhi* in compliance with the conditions set by the orthodox priests. The extensive outreach was successful and “practically all the forcibly converted, a figure that may have reached 2,500, were administered *shuddhi* and

restored to their old caste privileges.”<sup>61</sup> This success of the Arya Samaj bolstered its prestige amongst Hindus across India, and Swami Shraddhananda renewed his call to strengthen and expand the ranks of Hindus through a nationwide *shuddhi* campaign. At the same time, he impressed upon orthodox Hindus the urgency of eradicating untouchability through *shuddhi* and uplifting the lower castes and outcaste communities. Shraddhananda pressed the Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Grand Assembly), the conservative-orthodox Hindu political party, to pass a resolution unconditionally endorsing *shuddhi* and the eradication of untouchability. However, when the Mahasabha passed a resolution limiting their endorsement of *shuddhi* and resisting the complete integration of outcastes, Shraddhananda openly condemned the party for their hesitation and resigned from its membership, advocating the urgency “to get rid of all this rigmarole and to root out the curse of unseeability, unapproachability, untouchability and exclusiveness, there is only one sovereign remedy - and that is the resuscitation of the Ancient Aryan 'Varna-dharma.'”<sup>62</sup> In doing so, Shraddhananda emphasized the centrality of the religious purpose of *shuddhi* over the political agenda. In 1925, Shraddhananda launched the new Bharatiya Shuddhi Sabha (Indian Purification Organization), which was exclusively tasked with the responsibility of carrying out *Shuddhi* campaigns to reconvert and integrate Muslims, Christians and outcastes into the Hindu fold.

Perhaps the most significant *shuddhi* campaign that Shraddhananda guided in this period was the purification of the Malkana Rajputs. The term ‘Malkana’ was rooted in the word *milkiyat* (land ownership) and was applied to those Rajputs who reputedly converted to Islam in order to receive extensive land grants from Afghan rulers of northern India in the medieval ages.

<sup>61</sup> Jordens, *Reconversion*, p. 153.

<sup>62</sup> Sanyasi, p. 137.

However, this conversion was largely nominal, and the Malkanas had continued to observe both Hindu and Muslim customs, coming to be known as *adhbariya* (half Hindu-half Muslim).<sup>63</sup> Efforts to purify the Malkanas had begun in the 1900s, led by Shuddhi Sabhas organized by the Arya Samaj's Pandit Bhoj Dutt Sharma.<sup>64</sup> However, it was during Shraddhananda's leadership in the 1920s that the most successful mass *shuddhis* were performed. Although many historians have been inclined to view the Malkana *shuddhi* campaign as a Hindu nationalist project, Shraddhananda's own memoirs of the campaign reveal a two-pronged religious message that both sought the expansion of the Hindu community while criticizing the laxity and complacency of orthodox Hindus. In *Hindu Sanghathan: Savior of a Dying Race*, Shraddhananda discussed the case of the Malkana Rajputs, who had been ostracized by the Hindu Rajput caste community. Shraddhananda recounts how he mistook a deputation of Malkana Rajputs as being represents of the Hindu Rajput community and began to appeal to them to accept back into their fold the Malkana community.<sup>65</sup> Shraddhananda ascribed his mistake to the fact that the Malkana Rajputs had preserved their Hindu appearance, mannerisms and customs, despite their ostracism. Inquiring further with the Malkana representatives, Shraddhananda learned that they remained observant of vegetarianism and other Hindu rituals. Finally, he declared "it is not these brethren, who have maintained their Hindu faith through fire and sword, who have to be purified, it is their Hindu brethren who have to undergo purification ceremony (prayaschit) for their sin of neglecting their brethren for centuries."<sup>66</sup> Shraddhananda criticized the Rajput caste community for not taking any meaningful steps to fully re-integrate the Malkana community; relying simply upon the announcement of the acceptance of the Malkanas, "the Rajput Mahasabha went to

<sup>63</sup> Sikand and Katju, p. 2215-2216.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Sanyasi, p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> Sanyasi, p. 126.

sleep. I call the announcement misleading because an overwhelming majority of the Malkana Rajputs had never become Musalmans in faith and practice.”<sup>67</sup> Shraddhananda levied a severe criticism on upper-caste Hindus for having ostracized their brethren purely out of ignorance and prejudice and for lacking religious consciousness and unity. The indirect implication of his criticism was that as Hindu society was itself responsible for its crisis, the work of *shuddhi* was necessary to reform orthodox society as much as to purify outsiders, with the orthodox performing their own ‘purification’ by properly integrating the purified peoples and renouncing their old beliefs.

By the end of 1927, more than 163,000 Malkanas had been converted to Hinduism.<sup>68</sup> This *Shuddhi* campaign was significantly aided by the Kshatriya Upkarini Mahasabha (Kshatriya Upliftment Grand Assembly), which worked to build a consensus amongst Hindu Rajputs to integrate the Malkanas successfully. The Arya Samaj and its associated Shuddhi Sabhas also performed the *shuddhi* of other nominally Muslim caste communities such as the Mala Jats and the Bishnois. In these cases, both communities had never been fully converted to Islam and integrated within Muslim society but had been classified as Muslims in censuses as they had been recorded as observing many Islamic customs such as the burial of the dead, using Muslim names, employing the word ‘Allah’ for God and avoiding idol worship.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the *Shuddhi* campaign first initiated de-Islamization, convincing these communities to stop observing customs associated with Islam. After this was achieved, the communities were prepared for the *shuddhi* ceremony and integrated into Hindu society. In 1923, the Arya Samaj began a campaign to de-Islamize and undertake the *shuddhi* of the Bhangi untouchable caste of the city of Jodhpur.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>68</sup> Sikand and Katju, p. 2215-2216.

<sup>69</sup> Sikand and Katju, p. 2217.

According to census reports, approximately 62,844 converts from Islam, Christianity and tribal religions were added to Hinduism during the year 1927-1928.<sup>70</sup>

However, the Arya Samaj-driven *Shuddhi* movement began to substantially falter in the late 1920s due to the deaths of its most charismatic and influential leaders and subsequent factionalism. On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1926 Swami Shraddhananda was assassinated in Delhi by a Muslim extremist. In 1928, the Punjabi Arya leader Lala Lajpat Rai was severely beaten by police during a political rally protesting the Simon Commission, and soon died of a heart attack. After their deaths, the *shuddhi* movement organizations continued their work, but their success rate steadily declined. From its creation in March 1923 to March 1931, the Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha purified 183,342 persons.<sup>71</sup> However, from 1931 to 1947, only about 42,150 persons were purified, which is a considerably smaller number in comparison to the first decade of the organization's existence.<sup>72</sup> The Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha continued its work until the 1930s, when it fractured due to a dispute over Shraddhananda's methods and visions, into two factions, namely the Sabha itself and the new Akhil Bharatiya Shraddhananda Shuddhi Sabha (All India Shraddhananda Shuddhi Assembly).<sup>73</sup> As a result, the only effective leaders and robust organizations left to steward *shuddhi* campaigns were Hindu nationalists and conservatives who did not espouse the universalist outlook and more religion-driven purpose of *shuddhi* advocated by Shraddhananda.

The *shuddhi* campaigns undertaken by Hindu nationalist organizations were not aimed at reforming Hindu society as a whole but sought to build a stronger Hindu political identity and

<sup>70</sup> R.K. Ghai, *Shuddhi Movement in India: A Study of Its Socio-Political Dimensions* (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1990), p. 103.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102-103.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

forestall conversions to Islam and Christianity. After India's independence in 1947, the RSS patronized the creation of two affiliated organizations that have taken over the functions of *shuddhi* in independent India. The first of these was the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (Indigenous People's Welfare Organization), which aimed to 'Hinduize' and otherwise culturally assimilate the indigenous tribal peoples of India. The second was the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, VHP), which was created in 1964 as an explicitly religious organization and has functioned to continue *shuddhi* on the basis of caste integration. In 1975, the VHP organized several public meetings in the Indian state of Rajasthan bringing together the leaders of the Hindu Chauhan community to accept and reintegrate the Muslim Chauhan community after the *shuddhi* ceremony. The methods of the VHP in carrying out this *shuddhi* campaign were substantially different from the Arya Samaj. The VHP appealed to the Rajput caste identity, screening films on the lives of legendary Hindu Chauhan folk heroes, exhorting Muslim Chauhans to return to the faith of their glorious ancestors.<sup>74</sup> It organized *kirtan* sabhas, where devotional hymns and folk songs were performed, and preachers delivered sermons. However, it also used the methods of de-Islamization, by specifically instructing the Muslim Chauhans to stop the practice of circumcision, marry only according to Hindu rituals, use only Hindu names and not to call Muslim clerics to administer funerals.<sup>75</sup> To build support for the purification and integration process, the VHP did establish free hospitals and village medical clinics while distributing food and clothing amongst the poor of the Muslim Chauhans. The main *shuddhi* ceremony to be performed after the Muslim Chauhans submit a letter to the VHP voluntarily

<sup>74</sup> Sikand and Katju, p. 2218.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

declaring their intention to stop observing Muslim customs and taking a solemn oath to adhere to the “pure kshatriya dharma” (code of the warrior caste).<sup>76</sup>

The *shuddhi* movement initiated by Dayananda Saraswati and shaped by Swami Shradhdhananda represented a revolutionary moment in the history of Hinduism. Hitherto histories of the movement had portrayed it as an almost exclusively political campaign, almost presuming the Hindu religion to be a stratified, static and non-evolving system. However, in this historical moment, an orthodox and hierarchical religion was undergoing an intrinsic transformation, on both a localized as well as a national scale. A social and religious system based on rigid, birth-determined, unequal caste hierarchies for thousands of years was acted upon by religious innovations seeking equalization, assimilation and integration of outcastes and outsiders into its religious community. When examined in context of the religious history of India and Hinduism, even the failures of *shuddhi* campaigns reveal the innately religious character of the movement. The orthodox defense of the barriers to integration faced by the purified outcaste and the non-Hindu seeking entry into Hindu society were essentially religious arguments; a reactionary force that cherished an ancient worldview built on the supremacy of the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes over the Vaishya and Sudra castes. Although the Hindu nationalist strategy of *shuddhi* resorted to appeals to nationalist and caste pride, the concept of caste at its heart remains a Vedic religious concept, a mutated echo of an ancient hierarchy established thousands of years ago. The *shuddhi* movement also presents an important insight into the historical agents of religious and social change within Hinduism. As stratified as its social structure has been, the decentralized religious hierarchy of leadership permitted laymen such as

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



Dayananda and Shraddhananda to arise and introduce theological innovations, which in turn created socioreligious movements.

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