
Constructing Arya Identity: Making of Modern Hindu Public Culture in Colonial Lahore

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Abstract

The establishment of the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College in Lahore in 1886 marked a decisive stage in the institutional development of the Arya Samaj in colonial Punjab. Conceived as an educational institution that combined modern Western learning with Vedic religious principles, the college became a major centre for the production of a new Hindu educated elite and for the dissemination of Arya Samaj ideology. This article examines the historical circumstances that led to the founding of DAV College and analyses its changing role between 1886 and 1947. It argues that the college served not merely as an educational institution but also as an intellectual and organizational hub that fostered religious reform, community consolidation, and political consciousness among urban Hindus in Punjab. Drawing upon institutional records, contemporary newspapers, government reports, and Arya Samaj literature, the study traces how DAV College contributed to the construction of a distinct Hindu public identity while simultaneously responding to the educational and political opportunities created by British colonial rule. It further explores the relationship between the college and emerging nationalist politics, demonstrating that its influence evolved alongside changing political circumstances. By the 1920s and 1930s, as new political organizations and mass movements increasingly dominated public life, the institution's centrality gradually declined, reflecting a broader shift from educational reform to organized political mobilization. Rather than treating DAV College solely as an educational establishment, this article situates it within the wider history of colonial knowledge, religious reform, and communal politics. It argues that the college played a pivotal role in shaping Hindu intellectual life in Punjab and left a lasting imprint on the social and political landscape of late colonial India.

Keywords: Lahore, Arya Samaj, Dayanad Saraswati, Colonial Punjab, Swadeshi Movement, Proselytizing, Communalism.

Background: Evolution of Arya Samaj in Post Dayanand Situation

Little attention is paid on the role of the D.A.V College Lahore. This institute established, earlier as a school, later on transformed into college in 1889. The genesis of that educational institute was product of multifaceted challenges and requirement. In the lifetime of Dayanand, Arya Samajists were not considered as a completely different sect from the mainstream Hindus.¹ It was just

considered as a deviated reformatory body in the mainstream Hindus.ⁱⁱ However, after the death of Swami Dayanand, his immediate successors amended the constitution of the Arya Samaj. They made it compulsory to accept the religious tenets spelled out by Swami Dayanand.ⁱⁱⁱ During Dayanand's lifetime, it was not registered as a sect different from Hindus in the census returns of 1881. Aryas had realized that if they had not taken a detrimental identical step they would not sustain their different status and perpetuation of their particular agenda as well.

Thus, they had adopted a course, which had set their traits much stricter and shaped into a completely new order of a sect. Thus, a new confinement had rendered their status in the 1891 census as a new religion with new category.^{iv} This article would include D.A.V. College's earlier struggle for its contribution towards Arya Samaj with ultimate response received from the Arya Samajist. Next important foci would study that to what extent D.A.V. College had played its role in perpetuating or defining the Aryas as an exclusive body in the Punjabi Hindu community. Moreover, what was the doctrinal purpose to get that exclusive status in the specific settings of the late nineteenth century Punjab. The socio-political demand of the Punjabi Hindus Middle class while perpetuating their exclusivity. Thus, we find the infusion of socio-politics at the very behest of that movement in the shape of D.A.V. College networks. D.A.V. College had given a direction for the systematic expansion, and provided a base for the spread of Arya Samaj.^v

Foundation Stone of D.A.V

A memorial meeting was held on 8 November 1883.^{vi} In that meeting, it was decided that the best way to commemorate Dayanand is to establish an educational institute on his name. Thus, an Anglo-Vedic College Committee was constituted to collect funds. That committee was composed mostly of middle class men. Lala Lal Chand, Bhai Jawahir Singh, Lala Madan Singh, Lala Jiwan Das and Pandit Guru Dutt Vidyarthi were the members of that committee.^{vii} The collection of funds for the proposed institution presented many difficulties. In 1886 the funds of the Society stood at Rs. 32,000. This was obviously not enough money to encourage the promoters of the scheme. But the efforts of Pt. Guru Datt, Lajpat Rai, and Lala Chand had brought the collections to Rs. 1,32,000 by the end of 1889.^{viii} That amount was to build a huge building for the proper placement of the college.^{ix} Ultimately, on June 1, 1886, the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic High school was opened. L. Hans Raj became its first Honorary Headmaster. In the initial phase that school had receive much criticism by its own brethren, who thought the attempt was impractical and would lead to its ultimate failure.^x Some controversies were erupted not only among the Hindus, Sikhs but also among Arya Samajist themselves. A detailed study of the contemporary newspapers would reveal that there were many scuffling points among many Arya Samajist and non-Arya Samajist Hindus, Sikhs. Many non-Arya Samajist Hindus sects had shown their reservations regarding the proposed establishment of such an educational institutes on various pretexts. One opinion maintain that Dayanand was not the founder of any dogma; rather he had preached many methods to attain the classics of Vedic civilizations.

Thus, it is important to maintain his teachings in far more concerted way, by establishing strong manifestation such as D.A.V. College. Lala Lajpat Rai had favored the case who wanted to establish D.A.V. College for the strength of Arya Samaj.^{xi} On the other hand, many of the Arya Samajist were of the opposite view.^{xii} Many of the Hindus from the city of Lahore were strictly against establishing such institute. As they were of the opinion that "such kind of institute would lead to the exclusiveness within the Hindus community, which is already fragile and fragmented." A Sikh Joginder Singh granted the land of that college. That donation caused a stir among the local Sikh notables as they were quite critical of the teaching so the Dayanand Saraswati about the Sikh Gurus. They criticized Sikhs for granting the land piece.^{xiii} Muslims of Lahore also showed

resentment about the proposed establishment of such educational institute. Daily Koh-i-Noor had appreciated the inception of that college but had made it clear that the teachings of Davanand Saraswati should not be included in its syllabus.^{xiv}

The Role of Different Arya Personalities.

The people who made Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College were from middle class.^{xv} Late Lala Sain Das had dedicated his whole life for the establishment of the college. He had fixed a large amount of fund out his monthly salary for the purpose of this college.^{xvi} Establishment of that college owed primarily to the efforts of Lala Lal Chand,^{xvii} who was a successful lawyer of Lahore high court, was also dedicated towards the cause of college. Lala Lajpat Rai had convinced many of the educated Hindus of Lahore about the purpose behind the establishment of the college.^{xviii} Once on visiting the D.A.V. College Lahore, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, founder of the Islamia College Aligarh, said, "The building, science block and library of my college is better than yours. But I have no Hans Raj." Lala Hans Raj, offered to serve the Institution as a teacher free of any remuneration. His elder brother agreed to share his salary of rupees 80 per month with him. For the first two years, Lala Hans Raj served as an honorary Headmaster and for twenty-four years as honorary Principal.^{xix}

The framers of the constitution of the Dayanand Anglo Vedic Trust and Management Society, under the guidance of Lal Chand,^{xx} decided that no fund would be requested; as it could corrupt the real purpose behind the very idea. Only one medium of fund was to be encouraged and that was from the local and common people sincere with the cause of Arya Samaj.^{xxi} Thus, college authorities started voluntarily collecting money by going house to house.^{xxii} Gokal Chand Narang was of the opinion that it would be the only scheme, which could resulted into the emergence of the universal spread of Arya and Hinduism as well. Famous Bengali Historian Jadu Nath Sarkar was also very enthusiastic about the role of DAV in the future prospects of Arya ideology.^{xxiii} He was of the opinion that only through the Reinvigoration of the Vedic Teachings, Hinduism could gain its universal statuts. This statement is indicative of the universal approach Arya Samaj was going to reach. That role was initiated by the establishment of the DAV College and needed a further impetus in the form of its horizontal spread towards all across the India.

Function and Systems at D.A.V College

DAV College had manifested the strength of administration and organizations. Lala Lajpat Rai, a devoted Arya, stated in his book on Arya Samaj 'This institution was an emblem not only of the devotion of the Aryas, but also of the organizing and administrative capacity of the Hindu race.'^{xxiv} That college had advocated the revival of ancient learning and the perfection of the vernaculars of the country. It was decided that no non-Hindu was to be appointed at any post within this institute. It has also decided that only Arya Samajist should teach at the institute. The third principle imposed was not to seek monetary assistance from the British Authorities. All these principals were elaborated in the first Annual Report of the College.^{xxv}

"The School department was opened in June, 1886. At that time, a small house was rented outside the Mori Gate Lahore. Later on, it was shifted to the Wachowali Mandir. When the school started, Mahatama Hanns Raj has had enrolled only twenty-two students in a single room college. By the end of the first year, 505 students were on its rolls. In the Matriculation Examination of 1888 the school obtained the distinction of passing the largest number of students in the province. It was decided to add the Intermediate classes in 1889. In 1892, the College obtained the distinction of passing the largest number of students in the Intermediate Examination of the Punjab University. This encourage the Committee to open the Degree classes in 1893. In 1913, the school had on its

rolls as many as 1737 students and the college 903 students besides a sizable numbers studying in the purely Vedic department in the faculty of Hindu Medicine and in the Engineering and Tailoring Classes. In D.A.V. College, there were a large number of resident students 1697 in the college department and an equally considerable number in the school department. College had various departments; Elementary Physics, Chemistry, Elementary Botany, Elementary Biology and Higher Mathematics Sanskrit, Hindi, English, Persian, Philosophy, History, Political Economy, Logic. The staff consists of 41 professors; of these 9 were life members. The D. A.V. College at Lahore alone had turned out 2589 graduates during the past forty-two years. From the Dayanand High School Lahore alone, 4809 students had matriculated.^{xxvi} The Dayanand Industrial School Lahore trained scores of Hindu young men in the art crafts of tailoring, bookbinding and carpentry, teachers of religious preachers, and journalists.

In the boarding house of the D. A.V. High School, Lahore, an attempt was made to encourage the students to lead a well-regulated life. The College Hostel was capable for the boarding of more than 550 students. The Hostel was run as a big family affair.^{xxvii} Daily prayers were offered in the morning and evening and every week the students met in the Young Men's Arya Samaj to attend the discourse of Arya teachings on religious and social topics. On Sundays, they attended the weekly gathering of the Arya Samajists in the local meeting place. According to one version that was, the first Boarding school started and run in Northern India. Its name was The Dayanand Brahmchari Ashram. However, that boarding school was to be closed within very soon because of the indifferences of the parents. An endowment fund of over Rs. 2,00,000 enables the College to offer 57 stipends every year to its students.^{xxviii} On its Jubilee commemoration, it has launched forth another experiment in the Dayanand College Golden Jubilee Institute to impart instruction under factory conditions in selected arts and industries. One of the objects of the institution was the provision of technical education. In 1895, the first step in this direction was taken by opening the Engineering class.^{xxix} In 1899, the Medical College, Lahore, proposed to discontinue the Ayurveda class. Authorities at D.A.V College had found it an opportunity to revive their classical medication system of Ayurved with modern improvement to compete the contemporary demands. Very efficient arrangements have been made for the teaching of the Indian system of treatment coupled with instruction in such subjects as Anatomy, Pathology and elements of Bacteriology. The building of the Beli Ram Dissecting Block has placed the study of these modern subjects on a very sound footing. A very well run Pharmacy had come up with providing its students with practical experience in the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines.

Promoting Sanskrit Studies.

The D. A.V. Colleges and schools have done their best in popularizing Anglo-Sanskrit studies. By the end of nineteenth century, Sanskrit in Punjab was at its lowest ebb due to various factors. One factor was that Punjab had never been the hub of orthodox Hinduism throughout its medieval history. On the other hand, in United Provinces, Sanskrit had been in strongest position due to the extensive presence of Hindu orthodoxy. The greatest blow to the study of classics in the Punjab University has been dealt by the deplorable change of making the classics elective in the Matriculation scheme. Arrangements for a more systematic teaching of Sanskrit were also made. In 1896 a special scheme of studies was adopted for the purpose of placing the study of Sanskrit.^{xxx} Thus in that particular perspective, it was the credit of DAV college to impart special attention towards Sanskrit studies by formulating detailed course in Sanskrit language. The founders of the college had stated that the distinctive features of the proposed Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College would be to encourage and improve the study of Deonagri, to exclude Persian. As a result, a larger number of Sanskrit students turned out by DAV than even all other institutions put together. The

D.A.V. College at Lahore opened the M. A. Classes in Sanskrit in 1895. The next year, Fellowship for higher Sanskrit and Vedic studies was founded. Thus within ten years of its foundation the tiny school had developed into a full-fledged College providing instruction up to the M.A., and even beyond by imparting English education and encouraging the studies of Hindi, Classical Sanskrit and the Vedas. While attempts were thus being made to popularize English education, the study of Hindi was also made a compulsory subject. Every student who joined the D. A.V. High School, Lahore, was expected to learn Hindi. The efforts of the College to popularize the study of Sanskrit however bore fruit, and in 1902, the College passed as many students in Sanskrit in the Intermediate and the Degree Examinations as all institutions of the province had passed collectively.

In the earlier years, Arabic or Persian was popular with Hindus too. In 1870-71 as many as 6,684 Hindus were learning Arabic or Persian against 2,974 Hindus learning Sanskrit. But the influence of the Arya Samaj brought about a change, and in 1885-86 the number of Hindus reading or Persian came down to 1,390 (Sanskrit 1,787). In the following fifteen years most active period of the D. A.V. College and Arya) Arabic or Persian lost all Hindu scholars. Arabic and Persian have suffered heavy loss in Punjab. In Lahore, only Lahore Oriental College was imparting Sanskrit Education on small scale. Their method and syllabus about Sanskrit was also very limited and of initial level. Thus, it was realized by the authorities at D.A.V. College to pay exclusive attention to the study of the degenerated period of Sanskrit. There is another strong reason to pay special attention on the earlier works of Sanskrit was that was the major sources for the spread of classical text to infuse arguments in many of the Arya Ideological teachings were needing the support from classical text. Thus it was not only limited to the learning of Sanskrit. However, it was also to bring back the classical literature, which was in Sanskrit.^{xxx} Mr. J. Si me, the then Director of Public Instruction, Punjab, in his, report on the progress of education in the Punjab for 1895-96, attributes this phenomenon to the regeneration of Hindu thought in the Punjab. However, in 1926, a fatal blow was dealt to the classics by making them elective at the Matriculation and its repercussions are visible in the gradual fall in the number of Sanskrit students at the Intermediate and Degree examinations.

Library, Research and Publication Wing

That educational institution had carried on research work of a very high order in the field of Indian History, Sanskrit Literature, and Vedic Religion. The level of research quality established by DA College was of such immense that its Industrial Chemistry Department successfully placed its products in the market with the trademark of 'Bharat' throughout British India. It established a Fellowship for higher studies in 1895 at a time, when such a thing was rare in most of the Indian Universities. In order to give an impetus to the higher study of, and research in, Sanskrit and Indian history, the Lal Chand Library was established in 1917 in the memory of the first president of the D. A.-V. College Managing Committee, R. B. L. Lai Chand. This led to the opening of a Research and Publication Department. Even earlier, the College had been attempting to prepare and publish a series of textbooks of its own in various subjects. It is interesting to note that two of the earliest publications were a translation of Mill's Liberty by Raja Narendra Nath, M, A., and a translation of Bacon's Essays by the late L. Sain Dass. The splendid collection of manuscripts and books on Religion, Sanskrit Literature, and Indian History in the Lai Chand Library made research in these subjects possible. Two new types of publications were started, original Vedic works hitherto unpublished, in the D. A.V. College Oriental Series and D. A.V. College Historical Series. Two popular works, one on the history of Sanskrit Literature. All these publications have been well received in India and outside and great savants have often congratulated the College on this

useful branch of its activities.^{xxxii} It 1923, however, the Dayanand Industrial High School was open to provide a better-organized teaching of tailoring, bookbinding carpentry, smithy, and cycle repairing.^{xxxiii} A well thought out scheme of studies was prepared combining instruction in theory with practical training. A workshop was attached to the institution. It has also been decided to establish an iron foundry and provide instruction in allied subjects. With a view to encourage the starting of small industries, an Industrial Chemistry Department was opened to provide correct formulae for the preparation of such household necessities i.e. fountain-pen and writing ink , boot polish, shaving cream , and tooth paste and various products have been placed in the market.^{xxxiv}

Arya Preacher-laymen, No Priest Preparation

Arya ideology was not a religious sect similar to the other sect in mainstream Hinduism. Other Hindu sect had different sort of preachers to full fill the formal rituals and ceremonies. On the other hand, Aryas were different from them, as it abhors formal preachers for the circulation of its ideologies and other services in that particular regard. In 1896, a Theological Department was started in DAV College. It attracted many students but as Theology provided no regular career to these young men, their attendance was rather fitful. It was intended to train Arya Samajic missionaries, but as lay preachers mostly do the Arya Samajic work and there were no regularly ordained priests, nor a priestly order, the attempt was not very successful. It was then decided to prepare its students for various University examinations in Sanskrit, and performed a useful task in turning out scholars of Sanskrit bred in an Arya Samajic atmosphere. Later on, because of the expansion of the work of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, the need for an institution to train missionary', and priests was felt. In 1921, therefore, the Dayanand Brahma Mahavidyalaya was founded to meet this growing need. That institution had attracted students from all parts of India. Malabar, Mysore, Hyderabad, Orissa, Garhwal and Mauritius are represented in it. No fees were charged, and stipends are given to the board and lodging expenses of the poor students. All the students reside in the Ashrama attached to the Vidyalyaya. The full course extends over 4 years, the end of every two years' examinations were held and diploma conferred on the bases of vocational training. The founders of that college had thought that this college would become the vanguard of Vedic nationalism in the northern Hindustan. That Vedic indoctrination would enable them to perform better in the socio-politics of the county.

Conclusion

The history of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, Lahore, demonstrates that educational institutions in colonial India were far more than centres of learning; they were important sites for the construction of religious identity, intellectual leadership, and political consciousness. Established in 1886 in response to the educational and ideological challenges posed by colonial rule, Christian missionary activity, and competing reform movements, DAV College became the foremost institutional expression of the Arya Samaj in Punjab. By combining modern Western education with Vedic principles, it sought to produce an educated Hindu elite capable of preserving and promoting the movement's religious and social ideals while participating effectively in the colonial public sphere. The article has argued that DAV College played a central role in institutionalizing the Arya Samaj and in shaping a new generation of educated Hindus whose influence extended beyond the classroom into journalism, social reform, public debate, and politics. The college provided an organizational framework through which Arya Samaj ideals were disseminated and reproduced, contributing significantly to the emergence of a distinct Hindu public identity in colonial Punjab.

However, the institution's role evolved with changing political circumstances. As nationalist politics became increasingly dominated by mass organizations and electoral mobilization during the 1920s and 1930s, educational institutions gradually ceased to be the principal vehicles of political influence. While DAV College continued to maintain its educational importance, its earlier position as the primary intellectual and organizational centre of the Arya Samaj became less pronounced as political leadership shifted to broader provincial and all-India platforms. The experience of DAV College therefore illustrates the dynamic relationship between education, religion, and politics in colonial India. Its significance lies not only in its contribution to modern education but also in its role in shaping communal identities, producing influential intellectuals, and creating networks of leadership that profoundly influenced the social and political development of Punjab. By situating the college within the wider history of colonial educational reform and identity formation, this study demonstrates that institutions of higher learning were active agents in the making of modern South Asian society rather than passive recipients of colonial educational policy.

References

- ⁱ *Akhbar-i-Am*, Lahore, 5 December, 1890, Selections, PNNR.
- ⁱⁱ He is not required to believe in the articles in the philosophical tenets, theories and doctrines propounded by Dayaand in his works. Nor is he asked to acknowledge the Bhashya (commentary) of Swami Dayanand on the Vedas as true and free from mistakes, and to accept him as an infallible guide. They were bound to act according to the ten Niyams only. shiv 20
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Akhbar-i-Am*, Lahore, 5 December, 1890, Selections, PNNR.
- ^{iv} Ibbetson headed the Punjab census of 1881. shiv 98
- ^v Kumar, Shiv Gupta, *Arya Samaj and the Raj. (1875-1920)*(Delhi:Gitanjali Publishing House, 1991),15.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*,31,32.
- ^{vii} *Ibid.*
- ^{viii} The resources of the Arya Samajists were taxed to the utmost for the needs of the proposed institution. *Daily Milap*, Lahore,24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue.
- ^{ix} *Daily Milap*, Lahore,24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue.
- ^x*Ibid*
- ^{xi}*Shiv*. 107.
- ^{xii} The *Dharam Jiwan* (Lahore), of 11 November 1890,
- ^{xiii} The *Aflah-i-Punjab* (Lahore), of the 11th December 1888.
- ^{xiv}The *Koh-i-Nur* (Lahore), of the 19th February 1889,.
- ^{xv} *Daily Milap*, Lahore,24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue.
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xvii} R. B. Lai Chand was born in 1852. He was educated at Government College, Lahore, and received his Master's degree in 1876. As a student, R. B. Lai Chand won rare distinction and secured the coveted honor of being a Fuller's Exhibitioner of the Punjab University. In 1877 he joined the legal profession. He started practice at Allahabad but returned to Lahore a few years later. He became one of the first members of the Arya Smaj and until Swami Dayananda's death in 1884, when he formulated, a scheme for. Founding the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic College, he was little known. He became its first President and remained in that capacity for twenty years. .. *Self Abnegation In Politics* by Chand Lal R.b,Publication date 1938 Lahore Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha

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

^{xix} Shiv 34

^{xx} Ibid.

^{xxi} The framers of the constitution of the Dayanand Anglo Vedic Trust and Management Society—
R. B. L. Lai Chand,

M. A.L.L.B., Advocate, Lahore, and Lala Sain Dass, President, Arya Samaj, Lahore, primarily decided that any Arya Samajist paying Rs 100 was to be entitled to become the member of the D. A. V. College Society, any Arya Samaj collecting Rs 1,000 can select its representative on the Managing Committee, the 4 executive council of the Society. Under the guidance and with the untiring industry of R. B. Lai Chand, the D. A. V. College grew up into an unrivalled national educational center for the Hindus.-self-abnegation....

^{xxii} The people who made Dayanand Anglo College were from middle class. Daily Milap, Lahore, 24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue

^{xxiii} What I owe to DAV College by Dr. Sir Gokul Chand Narang, Daily Milap, Lahore, 24th October 1939 DAV College Golden Jubilee Issue

^{xxiv} Lajpat Rai, Arya Samaj Longmans (London: Green & Co.), xi.

^{xxv} Kumar, Shiv Gupta, Arya Samaj and the Raj. (1875-1920) (Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1991), 33.

^{xxvi} Ibid.

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} Out of the funded capital of Rs. 10 lakhs, only Rs 546,622 are available for the use of the different departments. The rest represents endowments for giving prizes and scholarships to the students in various institutions. Ibid.

^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} Lajpat Rai, 182.

^{xxxi} Ibid.

^{xxxii} Kumar, Shiv Gupta, Arya Samaj and the Raj. (1875-1920) (Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1991)

^{xxxiii} In 1921 it started an independent High School completely free from the Education Department and unhindered by the requirements of the University. However that scheme could not meet with expected successes and was converted into an Industrial School. It was then decided to prepare its students for various University examinations in Sanskrit, turning out scholars of Sanskrit breed in an Arya Samajic atmosphere.

^{xxxiv} Shiv 11