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## Jharkhand govt. abetted attack, says Swami Agnivesh



**Vikas Pathak**

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**Activist says his assailants said supporters of beef eating should leave India**

*Swami Agnivesh says he wants to challenge Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat to a public debate on the Vedas.*

### Why do you think the recent unexpected attack on you happened?

There was full complicity [in it] of the Jharkhand government. I had mailed the Chief Minister 12 days back that I wanted to meet him. Since I was supposed to address tribals protesting land acquisition for a corporate house near Pakur, the organisers had written to the police about the rally. Yet, there was no police protection and I was beaten up just before the rally, after I addressed a press conference.

The boys who attacked and abused me chanted "Jai Shri Ram", and demanded that supporters of beef eating should leave the country. The attackers are identified BJYM (Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha) activists. The police came after 30-45 minutes. I was taken to hospital and

given first aid. I missed the rally. My left ribs were paining after the attack. No BJP leader has yet called me up to talk about it, though some of them are my friends. Only Uma Bharti tweeted that the attack was wrong.

### **What do you plan to do now?**

I want to make it the starting point of a larger debate. I want to challenge RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat to have a debate with me on the Vedas, or perform a *yajna* with me. If he can do it, I will accept he is more Hindu than I. The Sangh Parivar hates the Arya Samaj, as the latter opposed superstition, idolatry, rejected caste and professed gender equality. Legally, I will continue to fight the case to get justice.

### **What is your view on cow protection, since you said the attackers referred to beef eating? The Arya Samaj was part of the cow protection movement.**

Arya Samaj founder Swami Dayanand wrote a book *Go-Karunanidhi*. He called the cow the *adi pashu* (original animal). But he also spoke for protection of sheep, camel and other animals. He believed they were an integral part of human life. I have protested against slaughterhouses and even animal slaughter on Bakrid. For, *qurbani* means to rid oneself of bad habits. Swami Dayanand also offered economic reasons for why the cow was a most useful animal. Make the cow the national animal, but then ill-treatment of cows should also become an offence.

### **So, are you saying you, too, believe in stopping cow slaughter, like the cow vigilante groups?**

I believe complaints should be filed with the administration and it should act. Violence is to be condemned. Educate people about the benefits of the cow and the uses its urine and dung can be put to. It should be a process of raising consciousness. Will the Prime Minister please tell us if there is a guarantee that the 200 cows he gifted in Rwanda will not be slaughtered after they stop giving milk?

### **But the Arya Samaj was also accused of polarising society on communal lines in the early 20th century....**

Swami Dayanand in [his book] *Satyarth Prakash* attacked all organised religions, including Puranic Hinduism. It was a critique of all religions, not abuse aimed at one religion. We have continued to be critical and rational. We have published a *Shuddh Manu Smriti*, the original one, without the later, casteist and patriarchal interpolations.

We invited people for an open debate on it but hardly anyone turned up. I believe Dr. Ambedkar should not have burned the *Manu Smriti* but written another book to critique it. Let us not forget that before Ambedkar or his followers, Arya Samaj leader Swami Shraddhanand had used the word Dalit and set up the Dalitoddhar Sabha.

### **But Shraddhanand's Shuddhi movement was also the precursor to the Ghar Wapasi campaigns of Hindutva outfits.**

He started it in a context. There were communities in west U.P. which were in a flux between Hinduism and Islam. He accepted them. He embraced Dalits through *shuddhi* by trying to correct Hinduism but was disappointed that the Hindu Mahasabha did not attack untouchability unequivocally.

