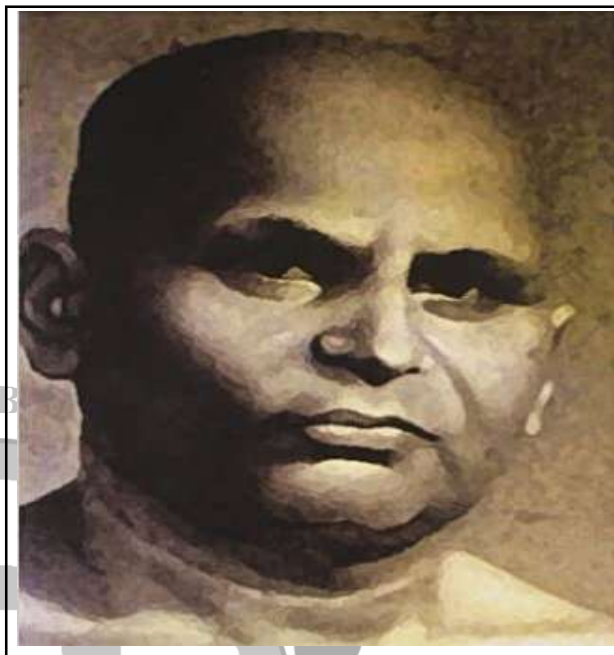


Swami Sahajanand Saraswati



Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was one of the best known peasant leaders of India he was the one who founded the All India Kisan Sabha. He was named Naurang Rai but later when he took up a journey to find answer to his insatiable quest for spirituality, he adopted the name Sahajanand Saraswati. He was active socially as well as politically, and during the Indian freedom movement Gandhi was his mentor. Swami firmly believed in Gandhian principles and worked closely with him.



Early Life

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was born as Naurang Rai on February 22, 1889 in the village of Deva, Dullahpur in Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh state. He was born as the sixth and last son in a Jijhoutia Bhumihar Brahmin family. His father, Beni Rai, was a cultivator and hence, stood away from priestly functions. His mother died when he was kid and was raised by his aunt. The family survived

1889: Born on February 22 in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh

1907: Renamed himself as Swami Sahajanand Saraswati

1920: Joined nationalist movement under Gandhiji

1929: Formed the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS)

1934: Ended relationship with Gandhi

1936: Established the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS)

1950: Died in Patna, Bihar on June 25, aged 61

2000: Commemorative stamp released by the Government of India

2007: Bihar Governor R.S. Gavai released a book on his life

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on a small zamindari income that was carried from his grandfather's time. However, with time and extension of the family, the land was divided and the family had to take up cultivation to earn its living. However, this did not stop the family from sending Sahajanand to school. After receiving formal education in a primary school, he went to German Mission High School where he obtained his education in English medium.

Since childhood, he was attracted towards religious practices. He objected on people believing in fake religious rituals and hence, opted for studying religious texts in order to find real spiritual solace by bidding goodbye to the world. To prevent him from doing this, his family got him married to a child bride, but his wife died in 1905 or early 1906, even before the marriage could even stabilize. On his last attempt to adopting the sanyas, he was initiated into holy orders and took the name of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. By adopting sanyas, he was abandoned from sitting in the matriculation examination. But he spent the first seven years studying religion, politics, and social affairs.

Beginning his public appearance from Bhumihar Brahmin, he graduated towards **Indian National Congress** and **Peasant Movement**, initially in Patna, Bihar, and later across India. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, he took up political schooling under him and started serving in the Congress as a true Gandhian. By 1920, Sahajanand was ready to plunge himself into the nationalist movement under Gandhi.

But he was disgusted with the hypocrisy and false faces of Gandhians within his first 15 years with the party. The final break up with Gandhi came in 1934 when Bihar was affected with a massive earthquake. Although relief operations were carried out, Sahajanand found that people were actually suffering due to the cruelty of the landlords rather than the earthquake. On sighting this, he went to Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi was at Patna during those days and when Sahajanand Swami asked him to help the peasants in distress) who replied with a wily answer indicating that the landlords will themselves handle the difficulties of the peasants. This came as a shock to Swami and he did not think twice before breaking the age old terms with Gandhi. Thus, Sahajanand ended the 14-year association with Gandhi on the pretext of pseudo-spiritualism, professions of non-

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violence, and religious hocus-pocus. After the break up, he kept away from party politics though he shifted his interest towards mobilizing the peasants. He was a Dandi sanyasi and hence, carried a long bamboo stick with him. Later on, this stick became the symbol of peasant resistance. He gave the Bihar peasants the slogan "**Danda Mera Zindabad**" (**Long live my stick**) which was assumed to be "Long live the danda (lathi) of the Kisans" and became an important motto in the movement. In response to this, the peasants took up "**Swamiji ki Jai**" (**Victory to Swamiji**) and "**Kaise Logey Malguzari, Latth Hamara Zindabad**" (**How will you collect rent as long as our sticks are powerful?**).

Sahajanand Saraswati formed a smaller **Kisan Sabha** in Patna district in association with a formal organizational structure, though it was institutionalized only after few years. Later in **1929**, he established the **Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS)**. With this, he emerged as the foremost kisan leader in India. Immediately after the formation of the Sabha, Bihar was plunged into the Civil Disobedience Movement that helped in creating awareness amongst the masses, but did not give enough time for the leaders of the Sabha to formalize its structure. As such, the experiences of the Civil Disobedience Movement inside and outside the jail created crevices between the Kisan Sabhaites and some Congress leaders. Thus, Sahajanand cut himself entirely from the political world for several years.

The membership of this Sabha was estimated 80,000 in 1935 with the numbers increasing to 2,50,000 in 1938, thereby making it the largest provincial body in India. The **All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS)** was formed with some Congress Socialists at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress on April 11, 1936. Sahajanand was elected as its first President. The Sabha comprised of many eminent leaders, like N.G. Ranga, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Pandit Karyanand Sharma, Pandit Yamuna Karjee, Pandit Yadunandan (Jadunandan) Sharma, Rahul Sankrityayan, P. Sundarayya, Ram Manohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, and Bankim Mukerji. It demanded the abolition of zamindari system and cancellation of rural debts. Thereafter, in October 1937, it adopted the red flag as its bann

Soon, the leaders started keeping distance from Congress and got more involved with Congress governments in Bihar and United

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Province. With the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha became one of its provincial units. Sahajanand organized the Anti-Compromise Conference with Subhas Chandra Bose against the British and Congress. In this context, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's teaching and preaching for the welfare of India's farmers continues to be relevant. Subhash Chandra Bose, the leader of the Forward Bloc had this to say: "Swami Sahajanand Saraswati is, in the land of ours, a name to conjure with. The undisputed leader of the peasant movement in India, he is today the idol of the masses and the hero of millions. *It was indeed a rare fortune to get him as the chairman of the Reception Committee of the All India Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh.* For the Forward Block, it was a privilege and an honour to get him as one of the foremost leaders of the Left movement and as a friend, philosopher, and guide of the Forward Block itself. Following Swamiji's lead, a large number of front-rank leaders of the peasant movement have been intimately associated with the Forward Block". He even worked with the Communist Party of India during World War II. However, he broke from all politicians to form his own Kisan Sabha and speak up for the peasants of Bihar. He also played a modernizing role in socio-cultural traditions. With Sardar Patel, he addressed many kisan sabhas in Bihar and advocated for their rights. The waiving of farmers' loans and the ensuring of farmers' income, issues that are still relevant today, were his main concerns and he is widely remembered as the founder of the All India Kisan Sabha. With his standards of speech and action, he was successful in creating a reputation for himself amongst peasants. He communicated with them and assured them about improving their conditions. In a short duration, he earned love and respect by the peasants, but was equally respected and feared by landlords, Congressmen, and officials.

Working in an era of nationalist upsurge and of struggle for hegemony over the peasant movement among socialists, communists, and left nationalists, Swami Sahajanand became engaged in debates and clashes over the causes of rural poverty, the nature of class divisions among the peasantry, and the role of the peasantry in revolutionary change—issues that remain controversial into the 1990s. He wrote and campaigned in Hindi, without formal education in English.

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Swami Sahajanand Saraswati died on June 25, 1950 in Patna, Bihar at the age of 61.

Posthumous Honors

A commemorative stamp was issued by the Government of India in memory of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati which was officially released by the then minister of Communications, Ram Vilas Paswan on June 26, 2000. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has instituted the Swamy Sahajanand Saraswati Extension Scientist/Worker Award in his honor. A two-day Kisan Mahapanchayat was organized on the occasion of his 112th birth anniversary in Rabindra Bhawan, Patna in 2001 which was inaugurated by the then state assembly Speaker Sadanand Singh and attended by several eminent personalities. A book on the life of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was released by Bihar Governor R.S. Gavai in Patna on his 57th death anniversary.



Q. Write a critical comments on the agrarian movement in Bihar with special reference to Swami Sahajanand (43rd BPSC 2001)

BIHAR NAMAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
NEW DELHI- 110084

(Approved By: Govt. Of India)

Mob:- 8368040065

Email- biharnaman@gmail.com

What's app- 9355167891

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[BIHAR NAMAN](#)

Telegram-

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