

Arya samaj

[History](#)



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CHAPTER-III THE ARYA SAMAJ AS A MOVEMENT Every religious movement aims at not only initiating a spiritual awakening but also reforming the contemporary society by trying to remove ignorance, superstitions, doubts and dogmas from the minds of people, thus ushering in a new kind of religious renaissance. In this respect, the Arya Samaj, as a religious movement, did not fall far behind, as it made a dynamic impact upon the Indians, forming an interesting and conspicuous chapter in the modern Hindu thought.

Through the preaching of Vedic ideals, it succeeded to a great extent, in reforming the then Indian society, inculcating in the people the moral values of life. In this chapter, we shall attempt to throw light on how the Arya Samaj as a movement was able to achieve its desired goal of revitalising the Indians from their stupor of lethargy and ignorance, initiating them to learn the invaluable greatness of the Vedic ideals and making them understand and accept these ideals as a way of life.

To be precise, the Arya Samaj tried its best to remove the social ills such as untouchability, cow-slaughter, forced widowhood, child-marriage and bringing about reforms through female education, permission for going abroad for higher learning, reconversion to Hinduism, and many other philanthropic work to inject a new life and vigour into the then morbid socio-religious environment of the Indian society. The major thrust of the movement was in the field of religion. The religious scene among the Hindus in the nineteenth century had become morbid.

Many religious beliefs and practices prevailed among the Hindu society which were not an essential inseparable part of true Hinduism. The puranic

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Hinduism had practically usurped the rightful place of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Hinduism had evolved many sects like Saivism, Vaisnavism, Saktism, Tantrism, the Swaminarayan and others. Religion degenerated into the performance of religious worship of idol and rigid rituals and its spiritualism began to be clouded and confused.

Religion began to be equated with temple going, the observance of shradha ceremony, pilgrimage to the holy places, observance of vratas and fasts in the expectation of fantastic earthly rewards, and beliefs in astrology. They did not know much about their holy books. They believed that anything written in Sanskrit was sacred. They often read books in Sanskrit which were not really good, only a few of them read Gita which was supposed to be composed by Lord Krishna: some read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great epics of India; but very few of them knew anything about the four Vedas, the sacred books of Hindus.

As a matter of fact the so called religious leaders of Hinduism, the members of the priestly class, supported by the pandits of Banaras, were interested in keeping the established order of things unchanged, as it brought them pecuniary gains and rewards in the form of charity and religious fees. Apart from the internal disease in the form of priestly domination, there were Christian missionaries, who with the tacit backing of European officials, were reaping a rich harvest by the religious conversions of the lower classes of Hindus.

In the religious sphere, the Arya Samaj has vigorously campaigned for the freedom of thought. Earlier all the words uttered by a Holy person were regarded as authoritative. None dared to criticise the interpolated Sanskrit

verses and non-Vedic teachings of the orthodox schools. It was the Arya Samaj that revolutionised the religious thought and ideas of the people. The Arya Samaj taught the people to think rationally. They were asked to determine the value of a percept in terms of the degree of truth it contained. They were urged to use their intellect and to reason out things for themselves before accepting them.

The scientific truths and the laws that govern nature were given their rightful place in religion. Dayananda was inspired by his Vedic knowledge and his deep study of the Shastras to reform Hinduism and make it free of all vices. He was of the opinion that in order to appreciate religious truth in its proper perspective, one should absolutely be free from prejudices and superstitions. He was of the view that human beings had the capacity to follow the path of truth which was the essence of religion, but were prevented from so doing by selfishness, ego, greed and avarice.

The Arya Samaj is not a new religion. It preaches the doctrines of the Vedas revealed to mankind by God in the beginning of the universe. It attempts at rehabilitating and reviving the Vedic truths which mankind had forgotten through ignorance and the advent of puranic literature, which blurred our vision and sent the vedic culture into the background. The Arya Samaj has dug out the Vedas down from the debris of the puranas, and installed them on the high pedestal of morality and infallibility they deserve. The Arya Samaj teaches the unity and oneness of God, the brotherhood of God: the conception of the Godhead given in the Vedas is the loftiest. It is this conception which the Arya Samaj has put forth before the world. It does not believe in idol worship, reincarnation of God, shraddhas, satisfaction of the

departed souls by offerings in their name. It believes in the transmigration of the souls and the beginningless and endlessness of God, soul and matter. It believes in the return of the soul in the form of Mukti, a state of beauty and immense happiness for a long period. There is no place in the Arya Samaj for the hereditary priest or for an ecclesiastical authority over the people.

It does not accept the innumerable rituals and ceremonies which choke the spirit and mock the religion. They interpreted the Vedas to justify the puranic mythology and thus they tried to give the present degenerate popular Hindu religion a Vedic sanction. Dayananda tried to interpret the Vedas on the basis of original texts without being influenced by the works of the commentators of the later age. In the book Satyarth Prakash Swami Dayananda tries to establish the thesis that the Vedic religion was absolutely monotheistic in nature.

In the Vedas there are hymns which assert the unity of God. In the words of Benjamin Walker, "Whereas Rammohan Roy had been attracted by the Upanishads and Vivekananda by the Vedanta, Dayananda went straight to the source of both these systems, the Vedas. He regarded the Vedas as the eternal, infallible, perfect and complete revelation of God, given to the world one hundred billion years ago." Rishi Aurobindo accepts that, "There is then nothing fantastic in Dayananda's idea that Veda contains truth of science as well as truth of religion." Lastly Rishi Aurobindo says:

Dayananda will be honored as the first who discovered the right clues, amidst the chaos and obscurity of ignorance and age-long misunderstanding. His was the eye of direct vision that pierced to the truth and fastened on that which was essential. He found the keys of the doors that time had closed and

rent asunder the seals of the imprisoned fountains. His lion like roaring voice ' Back to Vedas' appealed highly to the contemporary Indian sensibility groping since long in the dark. It was the origin of this Arya Dharma advancing with the motto:- We are Aryans'and our religion is ' Veda' ' Om' is our God and Truth the duty. We would establish the Arya Samaja's' i. e the societies of the noble men, throughout The world and teach all and sundry to practice all the true principles of course, having practiced them first ourselves. The Arya Samaj is not a religious sect as it does not believe in the human representation of God in the form of prophet, mediator or savior or Avatar(incarnation). Every man is directly connected with the supreme being and the worship of God means the holding of direct spiritual communion with Him.

Thus the Arya Samaj is deadly against all kinds of fetish-worship, idolatory, image-worship, tree-worship, river-worship, mountain-worship, star-worship, cow-worship, bird-worship or even man-worship. The worshiper's heart is the real temple of God, and meditation on the attributes of God is the true worship. Swami Dayananda has prescribed a simple mode of worship called prarthana or prayer consisting of eight Veda mantras and sandhya or worship which consists of the recitation of some Vedic mantras which speak of the attributes of God and seeking His blessings of one's efforts. It included yogic pranayam, that is the breath exercise.

All this does not take more than 15 to 20 mins a day. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Arya Samaj movement was perhaps the most powerful of socio-revival movements, which gave a new, more dynamic and concrete dimension to the social and religious regeneration movement in the

country. The Arya Samaj has had a greater dynamic impact on Indians over several generations than any other religious or social reform movement has in modern times. It is the most conspicuous movement of the times and one of the most important and interesting chapters of modern Hindu thought.

Not only did it want to bring about spiritual regeneration of India by purifying Hindu religion and Indian society, but also it tried to reestablish the pristine glory of Vedas and the Vedic religion. It was a crusade against socio-religious superstitions and prejudices like idolatry, child-marriage, rituals, etc, it upheld supremacy and the infallibility of the Vedas and the vedic knowledge. It was a part of the nineteenth century renaissance movement, that believed in Hindu revivalism and back to the Vedas was its call to the people. A number of social thoughts and practices were operating as serious obstacles to the growth and development of the nation's economy and traditions; to the state of ridicule and scorn of the western educated men and women. Some of these social evils were : untouchability, child-marriage, enforced widowhood, the denial of equality to women in religions and education, the ban on crossing the seas, the forced extravagance on marriage and death events, the compulsory use of fireworks in the public, the dowry system, the barter system in girls marriage and several other social ills, the Hindu society of the period suffered.

These evil customs were regarded as ordained by God and, therefore, they were as inseparable essential part of Hinduism. The Arya Samaj struggled hard to cure the society of this malady and make it socially healthy and culturally strong. Its contribution in the social fields was so singular and

distinct that even if it had done nothing else, it would still have a place of pioneer in the social reformation movement of this period. It aimed at establishing a universal religion and purifying the Indian society of its evils.

Lala Lajpat Rai says: The social ideals of the Arya Samaj are the ideals of the ancient Rishis of India. They were based on :- (1) The father of God and the brotherhood of men. (2) The equality of sexes. (3) Absolute justice and fair play between men and men and nations and nations. Equal opportunities to all according to their nature, karma and merit. (4) Love and charity towards all. The stigma that had darkened the name of the Hindu was the practice of untouchability, which was an off-shoot of the pernicious caste system. Dayananda had farsighted vision to see that the caste is the greater curse on India.

Based on a wrong interpretation of the well known purushsa-sukta, it had been working for the disruption of the Hindu society. Dayanada first thought to exorcise the obnoxious spell of untouchability. He vehemently opposed the practice of untouchability and worked for the upliftment of the oppressed and the so-called low castes of the society. Dayananda quoted the Vedas to prove that the varna of a person was determined by his character, good deeds and his sanskar. Truthfulness, self-sacrifice, knowledge of God and the Vedas can enable a sudra to enter into a higher varna.

Similarly, due to bad conduct, evil deeds, selfishness, a person belonging to the higher varna, may be degraded to a lower one in the social hierarchy. A person may be born of Brahmin parents, but he may become a sudra if he acts like one. Swami Dayananda preached the equality of mankind. He did not believe in any kind of distinctions between high and the low, the high-

caste and the low-caste. He taught the people to love one another and root out all thoughts of hate from the heart. Love was highest religion. One could win over enemies by Love.

Nut Love should not be confined to Human beings; even animals should be loved. It was cruel to inflict any kind of pain to them. The temples of the Arya Samaj are ever open to all the depressed classes. Many missionaries sacrificed their lives to secure equal social and religious status for the so called untouchables. They were not only declared for the first time eligible to study Sanskrit and the Vedas, but many of them became the preachers and teachers of Vedas in the Aryan Samaj. In many Arya Samaj temples there were preists who were born in the tso called untouchables castes.

They now performed sacramental rituals such as marriage, sacred thread ceremonial havans and other rituals, which were formerly performed exclusively by Brahamans. The Arya Samaj took up the cudgels for the people of the Hindu society, who were the victims of the then prevailing social ills as of child marriage and old marriage resulting in increased number of young widows, women who were ignorant of the world around them and they had turned widows at a tender age. The young widow's life was intolerable in the Hindu society.

She was held responsible for all the misfortune of thefamilyand was treated worse than a servant. Generally she was not allowed to marry again, and sometimes she was forced to burn herself to death with her husband. Swami Dayananda began his tirade in favour of wodow-remarraige and favoured the institution of Niyoga, as Niyoga was in vogue in ancient times. In 1856, Pt Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's praise-worthy advocacy was successful in <https://assignbuster.com/arya-samaj/>

getting the widow-remarriage Act passed. But it was rotting in the shelves of the lawyers as public prejudices were too strong to drive benefits from the law.

The Arya Samaj took the masses and succeeded in popularizing widow-remarriage. In bringing out reforms to the life of these young widows Sir Gangaram Trust has done a notable work. The trust has opened many Vidhwa-Ashrams in the northern parts of India. Thousands of widows for whom life was truly a living hell were leading a purposeful and meaningful lives under the roofs of these Ashrams. Today, of course, marriage of the widows has become an acceptable fact in the Hindu society. Another evil was the child marriage and the Arya Samaj did not lag behind in its attempts to remove this social evil.

Child-marriage was introduced into the Hindu society when the hordes of invaders began to pour into India at about the beginning of the Christian era, and the honour and chastity of women became unsafe. The Arya Samaj carried on a valiant crusade against this institution, and may be congratulated on the success it has met with in rallying public opinion in favour of its view. As regards the age of marriage, Swami Dayananda says in the 4th chapter of the Satya Prakash ``the best time for the marriage of girls is from sixteen to twenty-four years of age.

The lowest age for a girl for marriage is sixteen and for a man twenty-five. " He was aware of the evil and after impacts of child marriage, hence he suggested that there should be legislation to stop this evil practice. Social legislations sponsored by the Arya Samajists were passed as Acts in the central legislature. The Child Marriage Act known designed by prominent

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Arya Samajist were milestones on the road of the Indian Society. In the nineteenth century, among the orthodox Hindu, there was a strong prejudice against the education of girls.

They thought they should not be sent to school, as they believed that if women learnt to read and write they would come to grief and as a result they were married illiterate. The old saying was accepted Stei-Shudras-Nadhiyetam which meant women and low castes should never be taught. The custom of child marriage erected further barrier to the education of girls. Swami Dayananda pleaded for the equality of men and women and laid emphasis on the education for girls. He argued that an uneducated wife will be a liability to her husband and will also fail to discharge the real duties of a mother.

He condemned the economic and social injustice to which women were subjected. 50 years ago, all female education was under the direct management of the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj educational institutions were the first to open special and separate institutions for girls, where they were taught Sanskrit and Vedas, for which they were not eligible according to the orthodox Hindus. Besides learning Sankrit and Vedas, girls were declared entitled to wear the sacred thread like the boys. Noe female education has become so common that the people of his generation can't imagine what formidable opposition Arya Samaj had to encounter even for such a simple thing , as it now appears. Then also an unhealthy system was in full force which forbade the women to expose their face to the view of the males. as a result her face, was kept practically covered both indoors and outdoors during the day. Hence the Arya Samaj tried its best to remove the

purdah system, following the line of the great ancient Indian tradition. In the nineteenth century, for some reason, the orthodox Hinduism had turned its head resolutely against the indulgence of foreign travel by its members.

Crossing a sea outside the country was considered to be a veritable sin, the dire consequences for which was the out-casting of such culprits. This tended to cut off the contact of the Hindus with the outside world which made their thoughts and practices in various fields of life-culture, religion, social educational and politics narrow and stale. Dayananda's repudiation of the Hindu taboo against foreign travel was also motivated with similar concern for the welfare of the and the prosperity of the country.

Rejecting the popular Hindu belief that to go abroad is against Hindu religion, he said: This is all nonsense and propagated by ignorant and foolish people. Formerly people Aryavarta(India) used to go outside country for trade, state affairs and even as tourists, Now-a-days the fear of losing caste and religion is wrongly spread. Those who do not hesitate to visit different countries and Islands come in contact with different kinds of people and learn their customs and ways of living thus help the progress and better relations of their country.

They develop fearlessness and bravery. They adopt whatever is good in other countries and shun what is not good and thus achieve prosperity. Another, bold step undertaken by the Arya Samaj was to initiate the process of reconversion to Hinduism despite the stiff resistance of the orthodox religionists. Vedic religion is meant for all, it is universal in its teachings thus the Arya Samaj opens the door of the Vedic Dharma to all non-Hindus, to-what-so ever religion they may belong. For centuries the Hindus have been

the victims of religious fanaticism and proselytization by Muslim and Christian preachers.

In the Shuddhi Movement, Maharshi Dayananda introduced one revolutionary item in the programme of the Arya Samaj. He believed that 'lost' Hindus, that is the Hindus converted to other religions, should be brought back within the process known as the Shuddhi Movement. With Vedic liberalism and rationalism, he believed that the door of Hinduism should not remain closed to those who once had left it for some reason or other. In the years before World War I Shuddhi campaign was conducted among various untouchable groups in the northwest: On June 23, 1911 at Allahabad, the all India Shuddhi Sabha was founded by Ram Bhaj Dutta.

The Arya Samaj had developed Shuddhi as a weapon of defence from the conversion threat posed by both Christianity and Islam. Keeping in line the sentiment of the Hindus, the Arya Samaj also took up the cause of the protection of the cows. 'Goraksha' or protection of the cow was an integral part of Swami Dayananda's teachings and work. He was the first great man who raised his voice against cow-slaughter. Wherever he went, he vigorously preached against it, not on religious grounds, but for purely utilitarian, humanitarian and economic considerations.

It is because cow's milk is so essential for the sustenance and the well-being for human life physically, intellectually, mentally and spiritually that he so strongly pleaded for cow protection and condemned their slaughter. He appealed to high British administrative officials wherever he met them, for instance, at Ajmer to Col. Brooke, the Agent Governor for Rajputana, at Farukhabad to Mr. Muri Lt. Governor of the Northwest province to abolish the

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slaughter of cows explaining to them the material benefits the cow yields to mankind.

Later, he wrote ' Gokaunanudhi', fully showing the harm that the slaughter of cows was doing, and recounting the benefits that man derived from the cows. He even preached a memorial to be signed by two or three crores of people from all over the country including the Indian Princes, to be submitted to Queen Victoria and the British Parliament asking for the abolition of cow slaughter in India. Lakhs of signatures were obtained those of several ruling princes such as their Highness Moharana of udaipur, Maharaja of Jodhpur and Maharaja of Bundi.

His premature death, however, put a stop to the movement. In India, the land of Gods, because of their innocence and implicit faith in the supernatural, the people were victims of a number of superstitions. People believed in planetary influence like astrology, omens, evil spirits and ghosts. They tried to satisfy the deities for the fulfilment of their desires and believed in miracles. The Arya Samaj is the institution which strove hard to fight against the superstitions in India and abroad. Superstitious beliefs are responsible for the degradation of a nation.

Until and unless these beliefs are not wiped out no nation can progress. Arya Samaj deserves credit for this revolutionary action. It will be curious to note that even the Bhagabat Purana deprecates superstitious beliefs and hypocrisy. The Arya Samaj was the first body to denounce these malpractices. The Arya Samaj engages in philanthropic work on a large scale. Outside Christian circle it was the first purely Indian Association to organize orphanages and widow homes. The first Hindu orphanage was <https://assignbuster.com/arya-samaj/>

established in Ferozepur, on Punjab in the lifetime of the founder of the Samaj.

It still retains its position as the premier Hindu orphanage in India, has splendid and commodious buildings, all erected by private charity, and maintains schools and workshops for the training of boys and girls, There are a number of other orphanages on similar lines in Northern India, controlled by the Arya Samaj; besides these, many Hindu institutions and orphanages spread over India bear the impress and influence of the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj has also organised relief in the times of distress caused by natural calamities like famine, flood and earthquake. During the famine of 1897-98, 1900, 1902, 1907-08.

The Arya Samaj provided reliefs to the people affected by the calamities in effected areas in India. It was a very commendable service rendered by the Arya Samaj in organising reliefs operations for the famine stricken people. An important episode in the history of the Arya Samaj concerns its educational programme. In the 19th century India had come under the British rule and the contact with the West began in a direct and more powerful and effective way. The social renaissance movement in the country opened up new vistas under the impact of the spread of Western education.

There was introduction of English education in India. Indian youths lost their cultural moorings and national pride about glorious ancient cultural heritage. Though in body and colour of their skin, they remained Indians, yet in everything else; in dress, in mode of living, in opinion, in habits, in manners, in values, in attitude they became Englishmen, Disintegration set in, communalism went deep into the Indian mind and education didn't help for

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the enlightenment, character, social change, national integration, but it became a tool for getting jobs as clerks in government offices or as subordinate