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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# IMPACT OF ARYA SAMAJ ON THE FABRIC OF INDIAN SOCIETY IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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# Impact of Arya Samaj on the Fabric of Indian Society in 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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Two movements changed the face of Europe and revolutionized its culture that then conquered the world — Renaissance (that revived the long lost treasures of Greek and Latin literature) and Reformation. In India Rishi Dayananda Saraswati is the father of both Renaissance (he brought to life world's supreme knowledge, the Vedas, with his slogan 'Back to Vedas') and Reformation he sought to rid Hinduism of its massive superstitious practices and challenged the authority of the priesthood).

Romain Rolland called Rishi Dayananda Saraswati the Martin Luther (founder of Protestantism) in India. Dr Radhakrishnan called Arya Samaj the Protestant Church of India. Dr Annie Besant, the English lady who fought for India's Independence and even became president of the Congress (for one year), says; "When the Swaraj Temple is built, there will be images of all the leaders of the freedom movement and that of Rishi Dayananda will be the tallest".

Sir Syed Ahmad, founder of AMU, says: "Rishi Dayananda Saraswati is such a great man as has no equal in India". Rishi Dayananda Saraswati's work included launching the khadi movement, abolishing untouchability, emancipation of women (he started bringing women out of purdah to attend Arya Samaj functions) making Hindi as a national language, working for cow protection, uplifting rural and poor backward classes and so on. His movement made some dent. Later Mahatma Gandhi made all these programmes planks of his freedom movement. What Rishi Dayananda Saraswati had sowed, Gandhiji reaped with unique success. Gandhiji is called the Father of the Nation and the Congress called him the grandfather of the nation.

Such an immaculate physic, such determination of purpose, such bravery in mission, such physical forbearance, such sympathy for the entire world as against pity for his people, such indeed was the personality of Dayananda Saraswati, the greatest social reformer this century has seen.

Moolshankar as he was known in childhood days, was born in 1824 in the village of Tankara, in the state of

Gujarat, India.. What irony of mission for this orthodox Brahmin son--destined to revolutionize the entire fabric of the cancerous caste system which had tenaciously gripped the Indian sub-continent Dayananda's only weapon for upliftment and survival of his people was the revival of the Vedas. In his relentless battle, Dayananda propagated freedom of conscience which enabled the individual to eradicate all evidences of superstitious beliefs and practices. He detested all forms of religious propagandism which stifled tolerance, justice, and charity to persons of other religious background or even non-believers. Armed with the shield of fearlessness, the language of truth and the footsteps of spiritual light, Dayananda Saraswati the arena determined to rejuvenate the consciousness of the seemingly lost people.

Rejuvenation, for him, meant the resuscitation of the Aryan culture which is undoubtedly the foundation for spiritual and social development. Dayananda was that believer of the purity and infallibility of the Vedas who refused to accept any tenet or principle which negated that of the Vedas.

In the establishment of the ARYA SAMAJ Dayananda once again crystalized the Vedic concept of one omnipotent omniscient and omnipresent God who is formless. He re-established the total equality of all human beings and disregarded any notion of high and low. The Rishi very vehemently opposed the blind faith that a mediator is necessary for communication with the Almighty God. In his Vedic analysis he pointed out very scientifically that since God is the creator of the entire universe, there is no need to confine Him in a form of any shape or size. Swami Dayananda condemned the social evil of hereditary priesthood since, according to him, every individual has to merit his status in life by his own efforts. The Rishi strove to uproot all forms of unscientific and anti-Vedic rituals and ceremonies which was speedily creating a mockery of religion.

There are four other substantive claims that Swami Dayanand makes regarding the Vedas:

- a) In the matter of religion and in the spirit, the Western mind has not reached either the depth or the heights commanded by the Ancient Indian mind.
- b) In the matter of the social, the Indian solution aimed at in ancient times are as good and sound and effective as those arrived at in the West in modern times.
- c) In philosophy, India has nothing to learn from the West.
- d) In physical sciences, the West is far in advance of the Ancient Indians. India has had its successes in this regard. In 500 B.C.E., the Indian surgeon Sutra performed cataract surgery for the first time in the civilized world.

Dayananda, in prescribing the conditions for a healthy life in his SATYARTHA PRAKASH, enumerates the qualifications for the four stages of life and he insisted on celibacy as being the foundation of progressive family life. Discipline had been one of Swamiji's most potent weapons in his struggle with his opponents. He generated immense fear in his opponents with physical endurance and mental accomplishment. Cow protection became a priority in his social and religious campaign.

Dayananda's life reflected a mirror of truth based on his call for truth in speech, truth in the soul, truth in vision, truth in action and truth above all, Dayananda bequeathed upon his disciples the legacy of the same truth and hence the survival of Vedas and the Arya-Hindu culture was assured.

Swami Dayananda's call to the world was to rationalize with Vedic intuition and to treat everyone else with love, impartiality, tolerance and to seek a fulfillment of Vedic ideals. He vehemently deprecated the use of fraud, force or conspiracy in the conversion /re conversion process, but the Rishi encouraged conversion through honorable and free acceptance of the Vedic faith.

He saw the degraded and debased condition of the Hindus. His heart bled at the sight of millions of people, weak, disjointed, deranged and almost chaotic, helpless and hopeless, ignorant. Deluded, servile and dominated by few proud, parasitical, living in luxury. He wanted to unite the Hindus into one united people to cast off the artificial and self-imposed bonds that tied them to their present position. He wanted them to remove from their eyes the bandage that prevented them from seeing the light of Truth and Liberty. He wanted the society to arise pure and strong from the prevailing welter and corruption, ignorance and internal strife and stand on its own feet and take the proper place among the nations of the world.

With the above goals in mind, Maharishi Swami Dayanand established the Arya Samaj on April 10,

1875 ( Saturday, Chaitra Shukla 5, S.1932) in Dr Manik's garden near the Prathna Samaj Hall in Girgaun Road at 5:30 P.M.. The Arya samaj was based entirely on the authority of the Vedas conditioned by Rationalism and Utilitarianism. The Sanskrit word Arya means a person whose actions are noble and Samaj means society. Arya Samaj was founded as a Society of Noble Persons in Mumbai, India with the goals of promoting One God, the Vedas and their true teachings, and for the selfless service to the community. Maharshi Swami Dayanand Saraswati was its founding leader. The motto of Arya Samaj is *Krinvanto Vishvam Aaryam*, meaning make the whole world noble.

The sixth Principle of the Arya samaj illustrates the main goal of the samaj. It states "The Prime object of the Samaj is to do good to the world, i.e to ameliorate physical, spiritual and social standards of all persons." Since its establishment, the Arya samaj movement has made innumerable contributions in the social and spiritual fields. Some of the contributions are enumerated below.

**Religious Field:** Polytheism, Idolatry, Iconolatry, Animal sacrifice to please GOD, Avatars and Incarnation of GOD, Ancestor worship (Sradha), Pilgrimages, Pantheism and Priestcraft.

**Social Field:** Untouchability, Caste System, Child marriage, Polygamy, Widow Marriages, Sati, Purdah, cow protection and Women Education and Equality

**Untouchability:** Swamiji was deeply perturbed by the attitudes of Orthodox Brahmins towards the depressed class of the Hindus, known as Dalits, Outcaste or Untouchables. They were not allowed to enter Hindu temples, homes and Brahman rituals. They were prohibited to fetch water from the village wells. Their children were not allowed to study in the village school with other children. Swamiji was first to declare equal rights for lower caste, the right for education, right for reciting Ved mantras, right for interdinning, right for marriage and right to fetch water from common wells. Swami Shraddhanand (formerly known as Lala Munshi Ram) spent his whole life for the upliftment of the lower class. This cause was taken up by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party during freedom movement. Thanks to Swamiji that in 1950, The Indian Constitution adopted to provide equal social, religious and Cultural rights to the Dalits or Harijans.

**Caste System:** The Sanskrit word for the caste is Varna or Jati or Jat which means a group of people having a specific social rank. It also means "colour". Some authors believe that the Aryan (being fair in complexion) wanted to maintain their distinction from Dravidians (dark complexion) and used the colour to segregate them. According to Dr Karve, Varna is used in Vedas to denote class or category rather than colour.

The Varna system allows us to see how a system can survive for several million years. With the evolution of society, in order to maintain law and order and to govern effectively, it became essential to classify people not only in terms of their different qualities but also with respect to their different privileges. Each class thus, had a specific role to play in society as well as a unique function. Thus the four castes developed out of necessity. The Varna of Brahmins commonly identified with the learned ones. The Varna of Kshatriyas, associated with Ruler and Warriors. The Varna of Vaishyas, associated with Commercial livelihood. The Varna of Sudras, associated with Menial Labour. All were interlinked and functioned in close co-operation. There are thousands of Vedic mantras where we pray to GOD to let all live together, eat together, enjoy together, pray and progress together, fight the evil together and work for global peace together. Vedas also teach us that in the sight of GOD, all are equal and the colour or country makes no difference. There is no such thing as a master race or a superior or a Nordic race. The Arya Samaj has been propagating and implementing this in eradicating Caste system based on birth.

**Status of Women:** During the Vedic period, women were greatly honoured and enjoyed equal status with men. They were active participants in all fields of life. During the post-Vedic period, women started losing their status in society. Manu, the progenitor of Hindu race did not treat women at par with men so far as the Vedic rituals were concerned. The women were not eligible for the study of Vedas, nor for use of mantras in performing sacraments except marriage. He stated that being tender, women should be protected by father in childhood, by her husband in young age and by the sons in old age. She lost her identity after marriage. During the Moghul rule, women suffered further degradation. Since polygamy was a norm with the Muslims, they picked up any woman they wanted and kept her in their "harems". Indian women started using "Purdah" –a veil to protect themselves. Parents started marrying their daughters at an early age. Some began to consider a girl as misery and a burden which has to be shielded and protected from the eyes of intruders and needed extra care. On the other hand, a boy did not need any such protection. Thus a vicious circle started in which the women were at the receiving end. All this culminated into new evils such as Child marriage, Sati, Jauhar and restriction on girl education.

Maharishi Swami Dayanand was deeply perturbed with this sad plight of Indian women. He was the first to roar like a lion in public platforms for female education giving evidences of admirable type women Rishis like Gargi and Maitriya. Around 1870, Swamiji opened several Patashalas (schools) at Farrukabad, Kashi, Kasganj and Challsan. He also initiated a Kanya Patashala ( a girl school) at Meerut. After Swamiji's death, the Arya samaj movement under the leadership of teachers like Swami Shraddhanand,

Lala Dev Raj etc, continued to establish many girl schools. With the success of Kanya Pathshalas, on June 14, 1896 the Samaj established the Kanya Mahavidhyalay (Institute of higher education for women). The students of this institution included a mixture of unmarried, married and widow women. Since then the Arya Samaj has opened over 500 Institution throughout India. The Institutions include girl schools, girl colleges, Gurukuls, Orphanages, Industrial schools and Widow shelterhouses.

Indian women are indebted to Swamiji and the Arya samaj for restoring their rights so that they can become the President, the Prime-Minister of India and can compete with men as equals in every field of life.

As a whole, it can be said that the reforms of Arya Samaj are of great significance and have made huge impacts on the contemporary Hindu society. The Arya Samaj has become a major acculturative movement with its purified Hinduism.

The great revolution that took place in India in education in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century initiated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Swami Dayanand in the 1860's and 70's thought (and rightly so) that the best way of educating the then Hindu society about the truth, the vedic values, the Indian culture and tradition, was to establish vedic schools.

The first such school was established in 1869 in "Faroukhabad" with an enrolment of 50 students. Seeing the success of this establishment, very quickly 4 more vedic schools were founded in rapid succession with many more to follow. Some of the activities that were programmed into daily teaching curriculum included:

- The denunciation of "Murti Pooja" and the practicing of "Sandhya"
- The participation in "Agnihotra" twice a week, and
- The teaching of sunskrit.

Children of all castes were welcome and enrolled. The teaching of sunskrit (which was confined to "Brahmins" only) was opened to everyone. The most noteworthy feature of the vedic schools was that Vedas was recognised to be "THE PUSTAK" and the basis of all teachings. Those texts that were based on idol worship, false belief and witch craft were denounced. This formed the basis of Education in vedic schools.



Thousands of schools have since been established throughout the world that teach vedic knowledge embedded in the Country's/State's curriculum.

## CONTRIBUTION OF ARYA SAMAJ TO THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN INDIA

The contribution of the Arya Samaj to the freedom struggle in India can be understood by Swami Vivekananda's statement "that if there had not been the advent of Kabir, Nanak, and Chaitanya in the Mohammedan period, and the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj in our own day, then, by this time, the Mohammedans and Christians would have far outnumber the Hindus of the present day in India."

French servant, Romain Rolland, said that "he (Swami Dayanand) went further than Brahmo Samaj and even further than the Ramakrishna Mission venture of today. The Arya Samaj was undoubtedly the most dynamic socio-religious reform movement modern society has ever seen. "Among all the socio-religious reform movements, which tended to have a national scope and a program of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres" in the words of D. Pandey, "the Arya Samaj was the most important". In his book "New India", Sir Henry Cotton characterizes the history of the movement as "one of the most important, and interesting chapters of Modern Hindu Thought." Census Officer Mr. Blunt in 1912 termed it "the greatest movement in India of the past half century". Though the Arya Samaj was primarily concerned with social and religious reforms, its political impact was most conspicuous. As early as 1905 English monthly proclaimed "of all movements in India for the political regeneration of the country none is so potent as the Arya Samaj. The ideal of that society, as proclaimed by its founder is an absolutely free and independent form of nation". Swami Dayanand and the powerful organization he initiated, the Arya Samaj clearly unquestionably were the most potent factors in reforming, rejuvenating and rebuilding the institutions of India's political emancipation. Describing Swami Dayananda's contribution towards creating the national consciousness, Romain Rolland writes, "How great and uplifter of the people he was the most vigorous force of the immediate and present action in India at the movement of the rebirth and re-awakening of the national consciousness. His Arya Samaj prepared the way in 1905 for the revolt of Bengal. He was one of the most ardent prophets of reconstruction and of national organization. I feel that it was he who kept the Vigil". 63\7

"The real foundation of modern independent India was laid by Dayanand." These words of D.Vable are but recurrences of recorded facts. Swami Dayanand was the arch-prophet of freedom in India, indeed the ground-maker of a powerful movement of Indian politico-economic liberation.

In 1875, for the first time in the history of modern India, Swami Dayanand made a forceful plea for India's political independence, "Say what you will, self-government is by far the best. A foreign government perfectly free from religious prejudices, impartial towards all the natives and foreigners -kind, beneficial and just though it may be -can never render the people perfectly happy". Swami Dayanand was the first to rise against British dominion, the first Indian to use the word Swaraj, self-government. In the words of Mrs. Anne Besant, "Swami Dayanand was the first to proclaim India for Indians." Messages of revolt against the alien yoke pervade the Swami's works which from time to time formed the source of political inspiration-rousing people into active resistance to the alien influences." One day Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak saw to his amazement the renowned Parsi patriot Dada Bhai Naoroji turning over pages of Satyarth Prakash. He asked the Patriot, have you become an Arya Samajist? "No I get great respiration from Swami Dayananda's work in my struggle for Swarajya" was the reply. Such was impact of Swamiji's political messages. Even his prayers echoed some political sentiment like, "let foreigners not rule our country, may we not lose our independence". Speaking of the general causes which lead to political changes Swami Dayananda wrote, "When people acquire perfection in the military science and the art of war, and the army becomes so formidable that no one in the whole world can stand against it on a field of battle, pride and party spirit increase among them who then become unjust. Thereafter they lose all power either through mutual dissension, or a strong man from among families of little importance rises to distinction and is powerful enough to subjugate them, just as Shivaji and Govinda Singh rose against the Mohammedan rule and almost completely annihilated the Mussalman power in India".

Quoting this passage B.B.Majumdar in his work "History of Indian Social and political Ideas" writes, "With unerring instinct Swami Dayanand hits upon the psychological factors which are bound to bring about the fall of a ruling power. He was shrewd enough to hint merely at the eventuality of the loss of power by the British, without directly mentioning them by names".

It is noteworthy that long before the rise of the Indian National Congress Swami Dayananda included in the curriculum compulsory military training and the use of firearms. There is some truth, therefore, in the remarks of a rather unsympathetic critic Valentine Chirol, ".... the whole drift of Dayananda's teachings is far less to reform Hinduism than to range it into active resistance to the alien influence which threatened, in his opinion, to denationalize it." Despite some fundamental points of difference between Swami Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi, the former may be considered as the forerunner of Gandhi and the morning star of Indian Independence. It was Dayananda indeed who prepared the ground for Gandhi and that while Gandhi has been universally acknowledged as the father of the nation, A.A.Aiyangar, the former speaker of the

Indian Parliament described Dayananda as "The Grandfather of the Nation".

Thus, in whatever way we consider the Freedom Struggle in India, the contribution of the Arya Samaj was the most important and the most significant. No single, Hindu organization could equal or surpass this contribution.

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