



Contribution Of Arya Samaj In Indian Education System

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Abstract

The Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, played a pivotal role in revitalizing Indian education. Its emphasis on Vedic knowledge, social reform, and women's education significantly impacted the Indian educational landscape. In conclusion, the Arya Samaj's contributions to Indian education were multifaceted. By promoting Vedic education, establishing modern schools, advocating for women's education, and contributing to social reform, the Arya Samaj helped to shape the educational landscape of India and paved the way for future generations.

Key Words- Vedic Education, Modern Education, Women's Education, Social Reform, Nationalism

Introduction

In the ancient times, the whole of world had almost identical education system. The present day schools and colleges came to India with the advent of the Europeans and they were not very old in Europe as well. The big Universities in Europe also were schools for the religious scholars, the way they were in our country. Because of the early and fast progress of Science in Europe, their education system changed before ours' one¹.

Prior to the arrival of Muslims, the ancient Brahmins, Jains, and Buddhists imparted education to students in their homes. The student numbers were small, allowing for flexible teaching schedules. As children matured, parents would entrust them to a Guru (teacher) for education, often accompanied by donations. Students typically resided with the Guru throughout their education. If their homes were nearby, they might return home in the evenings and resume studies with the Guru in the mornings. There were no fixed arrival or departure times, and no grading system. During those times, there was no system of grades also².

Over time, educational methods evolved. Brahmins began teaching in temples and rest houses in towns, replacing the ancient Gurus and Gurukuls. Kings allocated land to educational temples, and generous

¹ H.R. Mehta, *A History Of Growth And Development Of Western Education In The Punjab* (1846-1884), Language Department Punjab, Patiala, 1971, P-17.

² T.S. Sodhi, *Bharti Sikhia*, Bawa Publishers, 4141 Urban Estate, Phase-II, Patiala, 1995, P-475.

individuals contributed to the construction of temples or boarding houses, providing food for teachers and students. This added to the spread of education and these religious cum education places kept becoming libraries as well³.

Like Hindu temples, the Masjids also became centres of education with the advent of the Mughal rule where the Maulvis (muslim priests) delivered religious education. The method of teaching was akin to the temples and in place of Vedic chants, Gita or Bhagwat and other than a complete teaching of Kuran Sharif, meaning and interpretation of history, land measurement⁴, etc. were also taught.

Initially, children entering a mosque for education often started on Fridays after the Friday Prayer (Jumma di namaj). The Maulvi was typically offered a piece of jagari, a cotton sheet, and a small monetary offering. They made up their living from the earnings from the land decreed to the Mosques and the Madrasas or from the offerings by the students⁵. Like Sanskrit pathshalas (schools) and the Farsi-Urdu Masjids, there was arrangements for Punjabi in the Sikh Gurudwaras and the Dharamshalas. In the Gurudwaras in the towns, the Granthis (the Sikh priests) managed all of the education affairs, but in the villages this management was in the hands of the Nirmalas and the Udasis (two Sikh sects). They recited from the Guru Granth Sahib in the morning, recited Rehras and Kirtan Sohla (two religious compositions) and taught the children in the day time. Their method of teaching was also like the Hindus and the Muslims⁶. Earlier, the letters were taught on the leveled soil or ash but later it changed to drawing letter lines on the wooden tablets. They faced no difficulty because Punjabi was their mother-tongue. The children learned to recite Guru Granth Sahib after Panj Granthi, Bai Vaaraan, Bhagat Bani and the Das Granthi (collections of different compositions from the Guru Granth). There were no Brahmanic Sanskrit Pathshalas in the villages. These were either in the towns or in the big temples⁷.

. In the early 19th century, under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule, Farsi was the primary language of the Lahore Darbar. Proficiency in Farsi was essential for government jobs, but illiteracy was widespread among Punjab Sikhs and lower-caste Hindus and Muslims. Only priests (Granthis) were literate, with their knowledge limited to reciting and singing holy verses (Gurbani). Their knowledge was also restricted to reciting and singing the holy verses (Gurbani). During the Sikh rule, the Hindus and Muslims were appointed on a number of jobs such as Munshis, clerks, writers, etc. because of their good acquaintance with the Farsi language⁸.

During that time, the Punjabi, Hindi and Sanskrit were taught in the Gurudwara, the temples and the mosques and the Pathshalas in the Punjab. The children belonging to different religions used to go to the Pathshalas for education. At that time, there were a number of schools in Amritsar for teaching Gurmukhi, which included schools run by Joona Singh Granthi, Bhai Ram Singh, Bhai Lakkhan Singh, Bawa Amar Das Udasi, and Bhai Kharak Singh Dhupia. Even then, the education was wider among the Hindus and the Muslims during the Sikh rule. Maulvi Shiekh Ahmed opened a Madrassa (the Muslim school) in Sialkot

³ Des Raj Grover, *Development Of Primary Education In Punjab*, Proceedings of Punjab History Conference, Patiala, 2007, P-532.

⁴ G.W. Leitner, *History Of Indigenous Education In Punjab Since Annexation And In 1882*, Sang- e Meel Publications, Calcutta 1882, PP-1,2.

⁵ B.S. Nijjar, *Punjab Under The Great Mughals 1526-1707*, Thacker, Bombay, 1968, P-146.

⁶ H.R. Mehta, *A History Of The Growth And Development Of Western Education In The Punjab* (1846-1884), *op.cit.*, PP-14, 15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, P-15.

⁸ Bhagat Singh, *Punjab Da Itihas*, Punjab State University Textbook Board, Chandigarh, 1983, P-632.

where proper knowledge of Farsi was provided⁹. In those Farsi schools, the Hindus and Sikhs also gained education. In Lahore, Fakir Azizudin opened a Madrassa from his own pocket to encourage the Farsi and Arabic languages. This promoted education.

But at that time, illiteracy was wider among the women. There were arrangements for education for the upper classes only. To teach the girls from the affluent families, the older learned women used to go to their homes. They were usually taught literature, mathematics, religious literature and the household chores. The number of literate women was very small at that time. But they commanded a great respect in the society. The wives of Maulvis and Sikh priests (Granthis) taught other children also along with their own which left a good impact for women in the society.

While Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself was not formally educated, he recognized the importance of education. He supported Muslim Madrassas, Hindu Pathshalas, Sikh Gurmukhi schools, and established new native schools. To promote English education alongside native education in Punjab, he sent Lehna Sikh Majithia to England in 1834 and made arrangements for the English education of his son Sher Singh. He invited John Lorry, a renowned teacher from the Mission School Ludhiana, to Lahore to establish an English school, but Lorry's condition of teaching the Bible was not accepted by the Maharaja. The Maharaja encouraged his subordinates to educate their children in English and provided government sponsorship for many students to attend the mission school in Ludhiana. Scholars were highly respected during Sikh rule, leading to the emergence of great historians like Sohan Lal Suri. To promote education, the Maharaja allocated larger estates and scholarships to institutions teaching Farsi, Arabic, Hindi, and Gurmukhi. Despite his efforts, Maharaja Ranjit Singh could only promote the native education system during his rule. Thus, Maharaja Ranjit Singh made every possible attempt to promote education during the Sikh rule, but he could promote only the native education system¹⁰.

The powerful Sikh rule declined after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849. The old native education system persisted in Punjab during British rule, while the western education system was introduced. Western education had a significant impact on the people of Punjab, as it was associated with the new political power (the British). The people of Punjab started seeing a new civilization and a new world in the western education system¹¹.

Upon British arrival in Punjab, most schools were Farsi and Urdu-based, also known as vernacular schools. Many schools in Punjab villages were primary schools, teaching up to the 5th standard, after which students progressed to middle schools in towns. The number of middle schools was limited, and students were taught up to the 8th standard. The first three classes in middle schools were in Urdu, followed by Farsi in the fourth class. Students were proficient in Farsi after attending these schools. The Roman script was taught in the last two classes. Students transitioning from native primary schools to English schools had to attend a special Junior Special Class, while those from vernacular middle schools attended the one-year Senior Special class. This dual system created challenges for students. In this way, the students faced a number of difficulties due to the native education system and the western education system¹². Still these students used to be more intelligent than the other students because they had a good knowledge of Urdu, Farsi, and the Roman scripts.

⁹ *Ibid.*, P-633.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, P-634.

¹¹ Sonu Kapla, *Punjab Ka Rajnitik Aur Aarthik Itihas*, Lokgeet Parkashan, Chandigarh, 2004, P-64.

¹² Ganda Singh (ed.), *Punjab (1849-1960)*, Bhai Jodh Singh Abhinandan Granth, Khalsa College, Patiala, P-367.

While western education began in the 18th century, the English had already occupied several Indian regions. This new education system significantly influenced the Indian people. However, the British, aiming to maintain their political power, sought to limit Indian exposure to western education. They promoted the native education system in Punjab to prevent political awakening among the people.

During the latter half of the 19th century, various reform movements emerged to address the social issues prevalent in Hindu society. Through these reform movements, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Devinder Nath Tagore, Keshav Chander Sen, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar, Swami Vivekanad, and Swami Dayanand made significant contributions to eliminate the social evils in Punjab¹³.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, born in 1824 into a Brahmin family, had a transformative experience at the age of 14. While visiting a Shiva temple, he observed that the idol, believed to protect devotees, could not even defend itself from rats. This realization led him to lose faith in idol worship. He later studied under Swami Virjanand in Mathura and devoted his life to eradicating social evils and superstitions in Hindu society. He went to Banaras, Calcutta, Punjab and Rajsthan for this¹⁴.

As a reformer, Swami Dayanand rejected rituals like idol worship, caste by birth, animal sacrifices, and the exclusion of women from reading the Vedas. He was not only a scholar and philosopher but also a social reformer and political thinker. His most significant contribution to education was the revival of the Indian educational system, advocating for the education of all social classes under one roof. Dayanand was responsible for the revival of the Indian educational system by bringing together pupils from different strata of the society under one umbrella, that is, classroom. He wrote a book named 'Satyarth Prakash'¹⁵ in 1874. He described his teachings in this book.

Swami Dayanand placed great faith in the Vedas, considering them the source of true knowledge. He founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875 to institutionalize efforts to eliminate social evils. The Arya Samaj, which believed in one God and rejected the caste system, gained widespread success, particularly in Punjab.

Thus, Swami Dayanand felt the pulse of the times and arrived at the conclusion that an institution to eliminate the social evils should be established through which the people's thinking could be changed. For this, he established an institution named Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875. Slowly, the branches of this institution started spreading in the whole of India. But the Arya Samaj achieved the greatest success in Punjab¹⁶.

¹³S.K. Bajaj and J.S. Rekhi, *Bharat Da Itihas* (1818-1919), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2000, P-202.

¹⁴Sudarshan Singh, *Punjab Da Itihas* (1849-1949), *op.cit.*, PP-72, 73.

¹⁵Tara Chand, *History Of The Freedom Movement In India, Volume II*, Ministry of Education, Government of India, New Delhi, 1967, PP-421-422.

¹⁶ S.K. Bajaj & J.S. Rekhi, *Bharat Da Itihas* (1818-1919), *op.cit.*, P-202

In 1877, during the famous Delhi Durbar, Swami Dayanand was invited to Punjab, where he established the first Arya Samaj in Lahore. The organization flourished in Punjab due to the region's relative openness to new ideas. The people of Punjab, weary of foreign invasions and social strife, found hope in Swami Dayanand's teachings. The Arya Samaj actively opposed conversions by Christian missionaries and Muslims, launching the Shuddhi movement to bring converts back to Hinduism and grant equal status to all castes. The Arya Samaj gained such an astounding success in Punjab that it left the Bombay Arya Samaj behind¹⁷.

After the establishment of the Lahore Arya Samaj, Swami Dayanand stayed in Punjab for 15 months and he visited different cities of Punjab during this period. First of all, he established Arya Samaj in Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Jalandhar. The members of these Arya Samaj spread Swami Dayanand's ideas with great enthusiasm which made a large number of educated people to join Arya Samaj. The Punjab Brahmins were less orthodox compared to the Brahmins of other provinces. They were engaged in occupations other than the priestly engagements. These Brahmins and the people from the Khatri and Vaish castes considered Swami Dayanand's teaching akin to theirs. Therefore, Swami Dayanand gained better success in the Punjab¹⁸. There were several reasons for Arya Samaj's success in Punjab. First, the people of Punjab had been facing foreign attacks. They were tired of the war life. Therefore, they were in search of a leader who could liberate them from such evil society¹⁹.

The people of Punjab had a new ray of hope after listening to Swami Dayanand's teachings. During the Middle Age when India was engulfed by conservative customs and superstitions, Guru Nank Dev and his successors brought a thinking among the people through their teachings which eliminated the social evils of the world. But with the passage of time, the people were again infected by these customs and superstitions. The Sikh Gurus liberated them from these. Thus, Swami Dayanand came as a new ray of hope for the people of Punjab²⁰. But the Christian missionaries and the Muslims were attempting religious conversions in Punjab. Swami Dayanand raised his voice against the conversions and started the Shuddhi or religious conversion movement again to bring the people from the lower castes back into the Hindu religion. He joined the people who had converted to Christianity or Islam back into the Hindu religion and gave them a status equal to the higher castes. Arya Samaj started the Shuddhi movement in Lahore too in 1893. Brahmo Samaj had also been established in Punjab by then. A large number of educated Bengalis joined the Brahmo Samaj. They started obtaining higher level jobs in Punjab. This proved to be a challenge²¹ for the people of Punjab. Due to this, they started joining the Arya Samaj. A reason other than this for the success of the Arya Samaj in Punjab was to give an equal status to women in society. Also, most of the Arya Samaj members were literate and a large number of them were teachers, doctors and lawyers. The caste-system was also weakening the Hindu society during those days. The Arya Samaj not only opposed the untouchability, it also made every effort to bring the people from the lower castes back into their society through the Shuddhi movement. The people saw a new hope in this and they started joining Arya Samaj. Actually, the Arya Samaj came into existence through the efforts of the common people. The middle class joined it in great numbers which became a factor for its success²². At that time, some such evils afflicted the society of

¹⁷Ganda Singh (ed.), *Punjab 1849-1960, op.cit.*, PP-149,150.

¹⁸Ravinder Kaur, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements And The Press (1885-1910)*, Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2008, P-630.

¹⁹J.N. Sarkar, *Swami Dayanand Saraswati - His Place In India, A Life History*, Harbilas Sharda (ed.), Dayanand Commemoration Volume, Ajmer, 1937, P-10.

²⁰*Op.Cit.*, P-11.

²¹Satish Kumar Sharma, *Social Movement And Social Change - A Study Of Arya Samaj And Untouchables In The Punjab*, B.R. Corporation, Delhi, 1985, P-25.

²²Ganda Singh (ed.), *Punjab 1849-1960, op.cit.*, P-152.

Punjab which needed a fight against them. A lower status to women, prohibition of widow-remarriage, child-marriage, the veil-custom, the dowry custom, and the untouchability were such social evils which were eating into the society of Punjab. The Arya Samaj decided to eliminate these evils.²³

Swami Dayanand accorded rights to women equal to men. He considered men and women equal. The principles framed by him applied equally to both. Swami Dayanand was in favour of educating boys and girls both. He motivated women to get educated and to study the Vedas. Some women made important contribution to the Arya Samaj movement²⁴. The Arya Samaj not only raised its voice against the child-marriage, it also motivated people for widow-remarriage. In the Arya Samaj gatherings, a campaign was waged against these evils. The D.A.V. institute didn't allow admission to the married children²⁵. Lala Lajpat Rai, Harbilas Sarda, and Mukhtiar Singh worked for making a law for abolition of child-marriage and in favour of encouraging inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. This is called Sarda Act. Ganga Ram founded the 'Vidhwa Vivah Sahayak Sabha' (the society helping widow-marriage) in Lahore and its branches were opened in many cities of the country. This was to encourage widow-remarriages. The Arya Samaj opened Ashrams (homes) in many places. They also made many efforts for the widow women²⁶. The veil-custom was prevalent among women then. The Arya Samaj took strong steps against this. The women were invited in the societal meetings. They were encouraged to engage in social service. Sarla Devi and Poorni Devi's names are eminent for such work. The Arya Samaji women joined to form a League. They trained women in tailoring and embroidery²⁷. The Arya Samaj also raised its voice against the dowry-system. The Arya Kumar Sabha made particular contribution in this²⁸. The Arya Samaj also worked against the evils of drinking and gambling. The Arya Samaj also raised its voice against prostitution. They formed a Naik Jati Sudhar Sabha for this purpose. The girls belonging to this caste were admitted to the Arya Schools. Besides, they were housed in Arya Ashrams²⁹.

Swami Dayanand's efforts to dismantle the caste system were significant, particularly through the Shuddhi movement, which aimed to integrate lower castes into mainstream Hindu society. Although not universally accepted within the Arya Samaj, these efforts marked a critical step towards social equality. The Christians stated about this that the Arya Samaj has given up the caste system but the Arya Samajis have not³⁰. There is no doubt that our society is still shackled by the caste-system. Though there were some evils prevalent in the Arya Samaj, but yet the Arya Samaj gave a direction³¹ to our society like the Sikh Gurus.

After Swami Dayanand's death in 1883, the Arya Samaj continued his legacy by establishing the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) School, which later became a renowned college. These institutions emphasized the study of Hindi, Sanskrit, and the Vedas, alongside science and English literature, fostering a spirit of self-reliance and nationalism.

²³*Op.cit.*, P-26.

²⁴Satyendra Prakash Nanda, Aas, *Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati: Jivan Karya Evam Darshan*, Alok Prakashan, Pathankot, 1996, P-85.

²⁵Madhu Chopra, *Bharat Ke Samajik Aur Dharmik Jivan Me Aarya Samaj Ka Yogdan*, Satyam Publishing House, 2006, P-73.

²⁶*Ibid.*, P-74.

²⁷S.R. Bakshi, *Arya Samaj, Swami Dayanand And His Ideology*, Volume II, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1991, P-11.

²⁸*Ibid.*, P-12.

²⁹Jaggiwan Mohan Walia, *A History Of The Punjab (1799-1947)*, Kalyani Publishers, Ludhiana, 1992, P-239.

³⁰Sudarshan Singh, *Punjab Da Itihas (1849-1947)*, *op.cit.*, PP-72-73.

³¹Ganda Singh (ed.), *Punjab 1849-1960*, *op.cit.*, P-154.

The Arya Samaj's contributions extended beyond education. The organization established orphanages and provided relief during famines, reflecting its commitment to social welfare. Although primarily a religious and social reform movement, Swami Dayanand's emphasis on Swadeshi (self-reliance) and his slogans like "Back to the Vedas" and "India for the Indians" inspired nationalist sentiments. But the Arya Samaj had no help of this kind. Even if the British Government offered any help to them, they did not accept it³². According to the principles laid out for the Dayanand College, there was a special arrangement for the study of Hindi, Sanskrit, and the Vedas but the study of Science and English literature were also given importance. A training of industrial skills was also promised along with the general studies³³. According to the rules of this institution, only the representatives from Arya Samaj could be its members and only the Indian teachers could teach there. Along with this, they accepted no economic help from the British Government. A rule was also laid out to give free education to students as far as possible³⁴.

All these facts show how Arya Samaj wanted to kindle a spirit of self-confidence and self-reliance among the people. It brought the Swadeshi (nativity) spirit in the education system. Actually, the Arya Samaj set a standard of its own for its educational institutions which were distinct from the prevalent western system to a great extent. Mahatma Hans Raj agreed to become the Honorary Head Master of the Dayanand School and he became Honorary Principal later on. He did a great work for Dayanand institutions³⁵. In 1899, D.A.V. School was opened and D.A.V. College was opened later on. Both of these institutions became famous in Punjab. At the time of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of this institution, the School had 1739 students on its rolls and the College had 903 students. Of these, 700 students lived in the boarding house. Not only in terms of the number, in terms of results to the students of the D.A.V. institutions have kept their place of pride at the University level³⁶. The Arya Samaj have made particular contribution for the women education too. The place which the D.A.V. School and the D.A.V. College had for boys' education in Punjab, the same place was held for the girls' education by the Kanya Mahavidyalaya³⁷ established in 1891 at Jalandhar.

Besides this, the Arya Samaj carried out several important works of social welfare. To support the orphan children was considered to be the most important responsibility by the Arya Samaj. Due to this, an orphanage was established in 1877 at Ferozepur. Children from each caste and each religion were kept in this orphanage. In 1877, one third of the children of this orphanage belonged to the Muslim religion. Along with the boarding and lodging of the children here, arrangements were also made for their education. During the horrible famines of 1896-97 and the 1899-1900 in the country, the Arya Samaj helped the people affected by the famines a lot. During this time, the Arya Samajis went to the famine affected regions and worked in all of the regions of the country and brought the orphaned children to the Ferozepur orphanage several times³⁸. Impressed by the good work of this orphanage, the Arya Samaj opened 10 more orphanages.

While Swami Dayanand did not advocate for political rebellion against the British, the Arya Samaj's involvement in the national movement, particularly in Punjab, demonstrated its broader impact on Indian society. The movement's success in Punjab can be attributed to its focus on social reform, education, and the revival of Indian cultural values, all of which resonated deeply with the people of the region. Swami used the

³²*Ibid.*, P-155.

³³Amrit Lal Gupta, *Bharti Sutantarta Da Itihas*, Punjabi Publishers, Jalandhar, 1964, PP-90, 91.

³⁴S.R. Bakshi, *Arya Samaj And Philosophy Of Swami Dayanand*, Vista International Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, P-180.

³⁵Madhu Chopra, *Bharat Ke Samajik Aur Rajnitik Jivan Me Aarya Samaj Ka Yogdan*, *Op.Cit.*, P-141.

³⁶*Report Of The Managing Committee Of The D.A.V. College Trust And Management Society*, New Delhi, 1984-85, PP-1, 2.

³⁷ *Op.cit.*, P-142.

³⁸S.R. Bakshi, *Arya Samaj And Philosophy of Swami Dayanand*, *op.cit.*, P-181.

Swadeshi word first of all and advised to use Swadeshi (native) goods³⁹. This filled the people with a national spirit and the Arya Samaj participated in its full power in the first national movement in Punjab. In the movement against the Patiala rule, court cases against many Arya Samajis were registered⁴⁰.

Conclusion

Thus, the Arya Samaj infused the national spirit among the people through religious and social reforms. A spirit of unity and equality spread around. The women were given equal place to men in the society. Thus, if these movements attempted to bring a particular change in the social structure here, the educational institutions run by them produced such patriots who never hesitated to give any kind of sacrifice for the freedom of the country.

The Arya Samaj also focused on women's rights, opposing child marriage, advocating for widow remarriage, and promoting education for girls. Women were encouraged to participate in public life and social service. The organization also fought against social evils like dowry, drinking, gambling, and prostitution.



³⁹Ganda Singh (ed.), *Punjab 1849-1960*, op.cit., P-159.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, P-160.