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## Role And Development Of The Arya Samaj In Kashmir

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*Abstract:* During the last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir witnessed the emergence of various and distinctive socio-religious reform movements. One of the movement came to prominence was the Arya Samaj in Kashmir. This movement was formed by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in April 1875 at Bombay. It was organized with an aim of bringing about social reforms in the society and to instill the strong values and ethics among young people. The branches of Arya Samaj spread in Kashmir which contributed much towards the reformation of society. This was endorsed by the enlightened people of Kashmir. This movement strongly resisted against blind rituals without any reason and understanding. The research paper has been presented with a purpose to review the broader outlook of Arya Samaj in fighting the rigid rituals and customs which spread in the form of social norms among the Hindus in Kashmir.

**Index Terms - Vedas, Arya Samaj, Child Marriages, Caste system, Hinduism**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Arya Samaj was one of most significant and growing movement and presents a substantial record of progress. Arya Samaj is compound of two Sanskrit's words 'Arya' and 'Samaj' Arya means a righteous man, high- soled, a man possessed of noble qualities. In ancient Sanskrit literature 'Arya' was the most honorable term with which you could accost another person. Samaj means a society or organization. Thus 'Arya Samaj' means a society of persons who mean to be good and to make others good.<sup>1</sup> Arya Samaj was founded by Dayanand Saraswati, the Gujrati Brahmin Ascetic, on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1875 at Bombay. On April 19, 1877 Dayanand Saraswati went to Lahore and founded the Lahore Arya Samaj on July 24, 1877 and a committee was constituted to frame the new principles of Arya Samaj which reads as follows<sup>2</sup> : -

1. Of all true knowledge and whatever is known from knowledge, the primary cause is God.
2. God is an embodiment of truth, intelligence and bliss, and without form, all-powerful, just, kind, unborn, infinite, unchangeable, beginning less, incomparable, support of all, lord of all, all-pervading, omniscient, imperishable, immortal, fearless, eternal, holy and creator of the universe, he alone is worthy of worship.
3. The Vedas are the books of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all the Aryas to read them. To teach them, to hear them and to preach them.
4. We should be ever ready to accept truth and renounce untruth.
5. Everything should be done according to the Dharma, that is, after considering what truth is and what is untruth.
6. The chief object of the Arya Samaj is to do well to the world, i e, to physical, spiritual and social improvement.
7. We should treat all with love, and justice according to their deserts.

8. We should dispel ignorance and diffuse knowledge.
9. Nobody should remain contented with his personal progress. One should count progress of all as one's own.
10. Everyone should consider oneself as bound in obeying social and benefiting rules, but everyone is free in matters pertaining to individual well-being.

## 2. Methodology

The study attempts to examine the "Role and Development of the Arya Samaj in Kashmir". This study is based on descriptive and historical approach. Furthermore primary as well as secondary data were collected and analyzed for the study, secondary data includes books, journals and web sources had also been collected for the study.

## 3. Arya Samaj In India

Arya Samaj believes in the central ideas of monotheism and infallibility of the Vedas, which are considered as divine revelation. They acquired their sanction directly from God, while other scriptures are accorded with the Vedas. Swami Dayanand preached that everything worth knowing in the most recent inventions was intimated to in Vedas.<sup>3</sup> Swami Dayanand renounced the various customs, rituals, beliefs, institutions and ceremonies. He combated against the traditional Hinduism, idol worship, rites and dogmas. He gave the slogan "back to the Vedas".<sup>4</sup>

Swami Dayanand also denounced the hereditary system of casteism and was against the superiority and authority of Brahmins on the basis of birth. He affirmed that the study of Vedas and other Hindu scriptures must be accessible to everyone without any caste distinctions. He strongly rebuked the worship of gods, goddesses and idols. He preached that only Supreme Being, formless and shapeless should be worshiped. Arya Samaj was against child marriages but encouraged the inter-caste marriages. It fixed the minimum age for girls and boys respectively 16 and 25 years. Dayanand was against the widow remarriages, he held that neither a widower nor a widow should marry. Though Dayanand permitted a childless husband to remarry and a widow to procreate sons by others according to Niyoga.<sup>5</sup>

The most prominent feature of the Arya Samaj was *shuddhi* (purification), which had been used in previous centuries to "purify" and readmit Hindus who had been converted to Islam or been involved in practices considered "impure" by their caste order. With *shuddhi*, Dayanand sought not only to "reconvert" any Hindus converted to Christianity or Islam, but, in a revolutionary departure from orthodoxy, also to convert Muslims and Christians who had never been Hindus. It also threw its membership open to all the creeds and castes even to Muslims and Christians. Another important feature of the Arya Samaj was Social service like expansion of English education through opening of the number of schools and colleges in various parts of the country. Arya Samaj also established number of orphanages in different parts of India. Immediately after the death of Swami Dayanand in 1883, the movement had gathered decent number of its branches in various parts of India. Besides this Arya Samaj was first non-Christian private organization started a social service for the relief of distress caused by famine.

## 4. Arya Samaj in Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir being situated on the neighborhood of Punjab came under the impact and contact of the Arya Samaj in the last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Earlier the atmosphere of Kashmir was not useful to socio-religious movements and even the Dogra rulers were not in favour of towards those movements. The state government had put on ban on the formation of all types of socio-religious movements.<sup>7</sup> though gradually the condition began to change with the beginning modern education in Kashmir.

The growth and rise of Arya Samaj in Kashmir are one of the significant developments in the history of Kashmir. It is one of the oldest reform movements that were launched within the Hindu community for the eradication of social dogmas. The Arya Samaj was founded in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1892 by the Hindus from the outside the state who had come from Punjab as state service or settled in the state for the purpose of Business. The first branch of Arya Samaj was established at Amira Kadal in Srinagar.<sup>8</sup> However, it is important to mention here that it was branch of Punjab Arya Pritinidhi Sabha. The aims of the Sabha were as under: -

- To establish a Vidyala for teaching of the Vedas and the ancient Sanskrit classic literature for the preparation Aryan Pradeshiks.
- To establish a library for the general public.
- To publish tracts and books for the purpose of refurbish the teachings of the Vedas.
- To arrange for the preaching of the Vedic Dharma in the Punjab, Northern-West Frontier, Kashmir, Sindh, Baluchistan and other places.<sup>9</sup>

The orthodox and superstitious Kashmiri Pandits did not join and recognize the Arya Samaj. They were against the movement because it was under the control and dominance of non-Kashmiri Hindus who had been patronized by the Maharaja Pratap Singh. The Kashmiri Pandits campaigned and propagated that to join the Arya Samaj was to lose the one's own faith. The Sanatan Dharam Sabha which was established in 1917 opposed the expansion and activities of the Arya Samaj in Kashmir. They published a pamphlet criticising the Arya Samaj. This caused animosity and enmity among the members of the Arya Samaj in Srinagar. They joined the hands and approached the Darbar with a view to securing the suppression of the pamphlet under the State Press Regulation. One of the main doctrines of Sanatan Dharam, which the Arya Samaj criticize, was 'Kashmir for Kashmiris' which meant "the exclusion of Punjabis and other non-Kashmiris from State appointments and sole employment of Kashmiri Hindus."<sup>10</sup> Despite the opposition the Samaj opened its offices at Amira Kadal, Mahraj Ganj, Huzribagh and Rainawari at Srinagar and one of its offices was opened at Baramulla.

Gradually some enlightened Pandits acknowledged the Arya Samaj because they wanted to free their society from the domination of orthodox Brahmins and other social evils and customs. The dynamic change in the attitude was due to the spread of western education among them. The Kashmiri Pandits joined the Arya Samaj around 1915 and extended their support to its social work<sup>11</sup>. But differences arose between Punjabi Hindus and Pro-Arya Samaj Kashmiri Pandits. That being the case Kashmiri Pandits established an independent socio-religious movement. In the meantime, his Highness Maharaja had issued the orders that no society can be opened without prior permission of government. The Kashmiri Pandits made an application to the government for grant of permission to establish an association named Kumar Sabha. At first the government rejected their application but finally they got permission and established Arya Kumar Sabha at Rainawari Srinagar. With the passage of time Arya Kumar Sabha became an integral part of Arya Samaj, Srinagar which was itself an essential part and parcel of Arya Pritinidhi Sabha of Punjab. Arya Kumar Sabha was the youth wing of the Arya Samaj and was affiliated with branches of Arya Samaj at Amira Kadal and Mahraj Ganj. The Arya Kumar Sabha worked as a part of the Vedic movement in the province of Kashmir<sup>12</sup>. The chief objectives of the Kumar Sabha / Arya Samaj in Kashmir valley were as follows: -

1. To propagate the Vedic principles;
2. To fight against the caste system;
3. To raise the status of women;
4. To educate women;
5. To abolish the civil institute of child marriage; and
6. To promote remarriage and protection of widows.

Mahesh Khushal Chand, editor of the daily Milat, Lahore, took the lead in the activities of Arya Samaj. He put his body and soul together to convey the message of Swami Dayanand to the Kashmiri Pandits. Even after becoming sanyasi he remained in constant touch and had taken a prominent part in educational activities of the Arya Samaj in Kashmir. Ramchandra Koul Abhay, Pandit Janki Nath Dhar, Pandit Madhav Joo Bhat, Pandit Dina Nath Koul, Pandit Sham Lal Koul, Pandit Sham Sundar Vaid and Jagan Nath Arya, were among the others who were associated with the Arya Samaj. Vishu Bandhu, Mahatma Hans Raj, Bhagwat Dutt and Swami Shiv Ratnanand ji Saraswati were among the non-Kashmiri Hindus associated with the Kashmir Arya Samaj.<sup>13</sup>

The Arya Samaj extended their reform activities by the eradication of social evils and prejudice. It emphasized the marriage of young widows whose number was alarming. Many of them were very young and innocent girls exposed to seduction and often led dejected lives. Tyndale Bisco, who illustrated the plight of widows, remarked "as there was no restriction to early marriage there were number of child widows who were obliged to live in their father-in-law's house, and do as they were told. I came to know of the cruelties practiced on these girls, especially by the Brahmin priests, who were fathers of drowned babies. The infants were thrown either in the river or pariah dogs at night so that the Hindu religion should not be disgraced".<sup>14</sup> Arya Samaj took a strong action in this direction, but were opposed by the Kashmiri Pandits, who were outside the fold of Arya Samaj, and orthodox Brahmins in the State emphatically opposed the proposal of widow-remarriages. They made attempts to disgrace and abuse the reformers, Ram Chandra Abhey one of the prominent reformers was greatly opposed and even attempts were made on his life. Although some enlightened Pandits cooperated and supported the Samaj to carry on the propaganda in favour of widow-marriages.<sup>15</sup>

In 1928, the leading and prominent figure of Arya Samaj, Lala Lajpat Rai came to Kashmir, on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1928 he delivered a speech at Huzribagh, Srinagar where he highlighted the problem of widow-marriages and child marriages. He also talked about the Shuddhi and Hindu Sangathan. As a result, the Samaj celebrated some widow-marriages in Srinagar and did its best to seize up the opposition.<sup>16</sup> The Arya

Samaj started campaign against the child marriage and actuated the public opinion against its nefarious effects. The marriages of juveniles were ritualistic rule rather than the exception and the Samajists were strongly opposed such marriages. It made the government to issue the orders, to deter immature and infants' marriages in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The government recognised the dire effects of the child marriages and passed Infant Marriage Act in 1929 A.D.<sup>1</sup> The marriage of boys under 18 and of girls less than 14 years was prohibited by this Act even before the Sharda Act was promulgated in British India. The widow marriage was also allowed in the State in 1931. Another important reform advocated by the Arya Samajists was the abolition of caste restriction in the matter of marriages. They also prompted the Kashmiri Pandits to lessen the expenditure of marriage ceremonies. They advocated the adoption of the marriage rituals in the Sanskar Vidhi rather than expensive and elaborate forms of popular Hinduism. But the Kashmiri Pandits strongly opposed reformists and appeared against any kind of social change. They realised that reduction in the expenditure of marriage ceremonies would lower their social status.

The main and important pillar of reform campaign of Arya Samaj was education. It ran a girl's middle school named Arya Putri Pathshala of its own building at Wazirbagh, Srinagar. It attracted a good number of student and its enrolments reached about 100 students on 1931A.D.<sup>18</sup> It opened Vanita Ashram at Rainawari, for the widows and lesson on three R's were given to them besides they were taught weaving and embroidery work so that they could earn their livelihood. Besides imparting modern education, Arya Samaj propagated Hindi and Sanskrit among Kashmiri Pandits. Arya Samaj opened a reading room where its members were need to read religious literature and to review and discuss various aspects of the Hindu religion and evils of Hindu society.<sup>19</sup> It important to note here that when the educated Kashmiri Pandit young men could not get the government jobs to the extent they used to get previously, the Christian Missionaries in Kashmir tried to provide job opportunities to them in the belief of converting them. This is clarified by the fact that a few Kashmiri young men in Srinagar converted to Christianity to provide permanent jobs for themselves in the Mission schools and Hospitals in the Kashmir Valley. It was the time when Arya Samaj begun to open the educational institutions like D.A.V. School Amirakadal, D.A.V. School Maharaj Ganj, and D.A.V. School Rainawari were established in the city. Smt. Devki Devi started Kanya pathshala in 1940 A.D. at Hazuri Bagh, Srinagar. One of the branches of D.A.V. College was also started in the city, but was closed after 1947 A.D. Presently there is a D.A.V. Higher Secondary School at Jawahir Nagar Srinagar.

The Arya Samaj had strongly denounced the rejected the idol-worship, performance of Shraddhas, a ceremony performed in honour of a dead ancestor. Due to this it had to face the hostility of the orthodox Brahmin priests.<sup>20</sup> These Brahmin priests attempted to keep the laymen unaware and ignorant about the real truth of life. They think that the Samajist activities are the economic constraints of their life; this is why they opposed the activities of the Samaj in Kashmir. But their opposition to idol-worship got declined. The Arya Samaj believed that the Vedas and those shastras which were in strict conformity with the Vedas alone are sacred due to that it was strongly opposed by the Sanatanists, and it remained confined only to the elite Pandit class of Kashmir. Another prominent principle advocated by Arya Samaj was Shuddhi. Initially, its protagonists got succeeded in making a few Muslims and two European ladies into the fold of Arya Samaj.<sup>21</sup> After their conversion Hindu names were given to them. But promptly it had to meet a robust opposition from the Muslims of the Valley. They raised their voice against the Shuddhi prachar of the Arya Samaj and begun to deliver speeches against Hinduism and Arya Samajists. Anti-Arya Samaj campaign was organized by some Muslim scholars and Moulvis, and made counter attack on Hindu religion at various public meetings, held at Huzuribagh, Srinagar. In an incident Muslim Moulvis followed by a mob of about three to four Muslims entered the premises of Arya Samaj Maharaj Gunj. They used quite repulsive and inadequate language against the Samajists, their religious books and leaders. This provoking attitude concluded on the proposal that a religious discussion be held between the Arya Samajists and the Muslims. But the State government did not give the permission for such type of discussions as they realised that it is contrary to the peace and tranquility of the State. Consequently, the clash of rivalry between the two continued,<sup>22</sup> and from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1924 when Arya Samaj going to held its anniversary, the Muslim organization like Anjuman-i-Hamdard Islam and Anjuman-i-Khankah-i-Mualla convened meetings and sent applications to the superintendent of police, Kashmir, requesting him to cautioned the Samajists and preventing them from such speeches which hurt the emotions other religionists. They complained that the Samajist used the abusive and hateful speeches against the Islam in their annual meetings and religious processions.<sup>23</sup>

The Arya Samaj, subsequently, practically failed in the mission of conversion among Muslims and Sikhs, though some government officers backed the Shuddhi Prachar, also participated in its activities, Maharaja Hari Singh himself had evolved close links with the movement of Arya Samaj. Arya Samaj was brought on the list of the receivers of family donation of the Maharaja. The influence of Arya Samaj on the Maharaja emulated that in his last will wherein he donated all his personal property to the trust, which is managed by Dayanand College Prabandak Society and Trust. This trust is running the Maharaja Hari Singh Agricultural School at Megbani in Jammu. It is worth to point out that the non-proselytising sect of Hinduism does not allow any flow from other religions while it has supplied converts to Islam and Christianity in great numbers. Shuddhi Prachar was another factor which was responsible for the failure of Samaj. Above mentioned the Muslims of Kashmir incriminated Arya Samaj of being anti-Islam and anti-Christianity, it may be true because Dayanand and his followers made speeches criticizing Islam, Christianity and even Sikhism<sup>24</sup> in the British Indian territory. Keeping in mind the secular traditions of Kashmir it did not raise antagonistic religious issues in Kashmir. Its slogan was Hindu-Muslim Ki Jai. Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that the Arya Samaj preached and believed on the superiority of Vedic religion over other religions.

Loknath, an outsider made a very repulsive speech and passed hateful comments on Prophet Ibrahim. In one of speech he lauded, "Until the flag of Arya Samaj could be seen floating over Churches, Mosques and Temples it would not be said that Arya Samaj tenants had made progress in the World. The government strongly came up against it, Loknath was outlawed to enter the State territories and further such type meetings were blocked. However, Loknath after three years of gap was again permitted to enter the territories of Jammu and Kashmir State.<sup>25</sup> Primarily, the Arya Samaj in Kashmir was socio-religious organization, but it could keep itself aside from the political developments In British India. It demanded "India for Indians". The Arya Samaj greatly supported the Gandhian movement of non-cooperation and enlightened the people on the essentiality and significance of Swaraj. The Samaj also requested the students to boycott schools and officials to boycott the offices<sup>26</sup>. It also came into contact with the revolutionaries and efforts were made for the attainment of Swaraj. Samaj, in some cases, assumed purely an extremist political attitude. It enrolled membership even from government servants including high officials, subscriptions were collected for Tilak Fund.

The Arya Samajists held the anniversary celebrations in the Kashmir valley (Srinagar) from 27 June to 6 July 1925 at two different places, namely Hazarui Bagh and Habba Kadal of the Srinagar city. Movements prominent leaders in the celebration were Swami Shri Shiv Ratnanand Ji Saraswati, Pandit Gopi Nath, Editor, 'Akbar-i-Aam', Pandit Prasad Ram Zadoo, Pandit Gopi Nath Kala and Pandit Thakur Joo Manwatis were the activists who took the leading role in celebrating its anniversary and in addition to these annual meetings, processions were marked by singing in praise of Indian Freedom Movement. Meanwhile the government issued the orders to stop the Samaj from the political activities, and also issued instruction that the activities of the Arya Samaj should be acutely watched and dealt with effectively.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

During the late nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements in the state emerged with a view to bring change in the mindset of the members of their own communities, it is necessary to free the society from medieval obscurantism. Thus, the reform movements organized by the Hindus of Kashmir in the twentieth century corresponded to similar movements launched by the leaders in nineteenth century British India. The Arya Samaj in Kashmir attempts to bring about a reformation in the socio-religious outlook of the Hindu community. The Samaj being based on monotheism and infallibility of the Vedas, and bereft of Brahmanical domination and rigid caste system was acceptable similar to the enlightened Hindus who sought greater freedom and some of the uneducated victims who suffered under the traditional order.

Despite of opposition the Samaj succeeded in awakening of the Kashmiri Pandits from the slumber of ignorance and darkness. The Samaj imbued a sense of pride among the Pandits in their ancient culture. It indirectly acted as check on their young men being converted to Christianity or Islam. As a result, the population of Pandits increased by 6.9 percent<sup>28</sup>. This was one of the greatest contributions of Arya Samaj in Kashmir. It alleviated the plight of women and made great efforts in the expansion of education among them. It celebrated widow marriages and this served a lead to the Pandit community.

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