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## WOMEN ISSUES AND ARYA SAMAJ

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### Abstract

The Arya Samaj was a revivalist movement. It took inspiration from indigenous culture. Arya Samaj is basically based on equal opportunities for all according to various social ideals such as equality of gender, full justice and fair competition between men and women and their nature, karma and merit. The producers of Arya Samaj strongly opposed child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, curtain practice. Maharishi Dayanand found a solution to all social evils through women's education. But the leadership of the Arya Samaj found it difficult to understand the changed position of women outside the jurisdiction of the house. In the process of constituting ideas and incorporating them into practical life, the Arya Samaj could not move beyond the trap of patriarchal ideology.

**Keywords:** Social Ideals of Arya Samaj, Child Marriage, Widow Remarriage, Purdha System.

### 1-Introduction

Various social religious reform movements such as 'BrahmSamaj', 'PrathanaSamaj', 'Arya Samaj', 'Dev Samaj', 'Singh Sabha Movement' and 'Aligarh Movement' played a notable role in influencing society in different parts of India since the thirties of the 19th century. The leaders of all the movements tried to reorder the society in the areas of 'social behaviour, customs and structure and control'. In this context, "women" assumed the importance of development and many reformers advocated for improving the condition of this disadvantaged section of society.

### 2-Concerns and major Social Ideals of Arya Samaj

The major concerns of the Arya Samaj are based on issues like gender equality, full justice, equal opportunities for women and opposition to male-dominated power, etc. Swami Dayanand's commendable work 'Satyarth Prakash' was published in the year 1875, though after his death a revised and extended version appeared in 1884, enunciating his unique principles. His motto was 'Return to the Vedas'. When Swami Dayanand started his work in the second half of the 19th century, he realised that Hindu society had declined. Hindu culture had become a vast, stable, orthodox. Arya Samaj along with other major issues like spreading education among the general public to create awareness made efforts for upliftment of lower class and women. Because the situation of women in general was pathetic at that time. They had lost their high place in the family as well as in the society and had to depend on the male members of their family.

### 3-Swami Dayananda's view on place of women in society

Swami Dayanand tried his best to eradicate all social evils related to women and included "women's liberation" as an integral one. He assigned the highest rights to women in domestic affairs and advocated equal rights to men and women in all kinds, in terms of education, marriage and property. He mentioned Manu in support of his idea, writing that "where women are respected, the gods are pleased, but where humiliated, all religious rites become useless." The happiness or sorrow of women depends on the happiness or sorrow of the whole family".

### 4-Prohibition of Child Marriage

With regard to the age of marriage, Swami Dayanand Ji says that the most opportune time of marriage for a woman is 16 to 26 years. In the case of men, it is 24 to 48 years. The Arya Samaj insists on strict adherence to celibacy by the youth of both sexes, that is, the realization of a proper amount of maturity of the body and mind before marriage. He says a country is plunged into misery, which neglects celibacy. Therefore, the age long Indian tradition of Svayamvara (self-choice) is the best form of marriage. Marriage with mutual consent was susceptible to the least disruption and conducive to the birth of excellent progeny.

### 5-Emphasis on Widow Remarriage

The Arya Socialists strongly supported the widow remarriage movement. Swami Dayanand favoured the marriage of a widow whose husband died without having intercourse with her. Swami Dayanand advocated niyog. According to this tradition, a widow can have cohabitation with another person for the purpose of producing offspring. The Arya Socialists launched an awareness movement to create awareness about widow remarriage.

In terms of widows' remarriage, they argue that the remarriage of widows especially virgin widows was not a violation of the Vedic tradition. These literatures such as the "Sada-I Haq" (voice of truth) of the Arya Samajis of Lahore, Amritsar and Muhat of



MushiJeevan Das and Pandit Article Ram's "Risala-e-Naveed-e-Begwan" (a book containing the news of happiness for widows) further strengthened the widow remarriage.

### 6-Condemnation of the Purdah system

The Purdah was another notable feature of social life between Hindus and Muslims. It had become a symbol of social prestige; it also became a means of personal security. In this respect, the Arya Samaj first tried to break the Purdah system and supported giving full freedom to the woman. Any woman can be a member of the Arya Samaj and can vote and represent in the organization of higher bodies like Arya Samaj, The Prestigious Assembly, Arya Shiromani Sabha, Arya Dharma Sabha, etc. All these bodies have been totally pro-women's freedom.

### 7-Arya Samaj and Women's Education

The Arya Samaj which was originally based on scientific principles, the spread of education was an article of faith, embodied in its ten principles. Dayanand conceived an independent social system with education and did not consider the status of a person as a determinant birth. He found and underlined all social abuse in education.

Arya Samajis believe that there is a need to spread education among women. The need for development of women's education was for the betterment of progeny as Swami Dayanand Satyarth says in the light: Women should have equal rights as men. But he has described the difference between girls in school duration as compared to boys.

### 8- Nature of Women's Education

However, the nature of women's education relates to caste. Women of all castes in the society did not have to get all kinds of education. The basic knowledge of some subjects, such as mathematics grammar, dharma craft art, etc., has been essential for women. Satyarth Prakash said that such minimum knowledge was intended to equip women as ideal wives and mothers. His role outside the four walls of the house was not considered except in exceptional circumstances. Gurukuls were established for girls' education at an early stage to accomplish this objective. But Swami Dayanand was against the co-education of boys and girls. Swami Ji was totally against regarding gender relations in educational centers. During 1885-88, Amritsar Arya samaj provided continual leadership while Lahore society focused on Dayanand Anglo-Vedic schools and Jalandhar society provided new patterns of inspiration and leadership. The society opened a girls' school in September (1888), Munshi Ram started a girls' school in Talwan, but due to the ineptitude of female teachers, she had to close it soon. However, he did not give up. In October, when she heard from her daughter how her teacher at the missionary school stood up to indulge in Christian propaganda among pupils, she withdrew her and decided to open a girls' school in Jalandhar. In 1880, the education of girls was organized on the basis of the principles laid down by Swami Dayanand at Dev Raj (manager of Arya Kanya Pathik) at Jalandhar. So, apart from basic, the course of Virgo school included sewing, embroidery, drawing, cooking, music, poetry, sports, arithmetic and religious literature. Till 1889, Ferozepur Arya Samaj, Gujarat Samaj and Bagwanpura organized a girls' school with the objective of establishing a Virgo college. Thus, the Arya Samaj showed sensitivity towards women's education.

### 9- Opening of Kanya College

Despite various hurdles, Lala Dev Raj and Lala Munshi Ram opened a Virgo college on June 14. The employees of the Virgo College urged their graduates to open schools in their homes. In 1898, the Virgo College established the monthly 'Pancham Pandanta', Hindi designed to propagate and propagate the relevance of girls' education. The magazine succeeded in achieving its objective. Another monthly magazine 'Bharti' was started in Hindi in 1920-22. Regarding the moral duties of women, Says Lala Dev Raj- It is your duty to help your parents in household chores.

### 10-Conclusion

The second half of the 19th century was the era of 'definition and redefinition'. Leaders of all social religious movements aspired to reorder society in the areas of social behaviour, customs and structure or control. They initiated the process of regeneration and revitalization of cultural norms and social practices. The Arya Samaj was aimed at bringing out national progress and great work before the problem of social reconstruction. The Arya Samaj made efforts for the upliftment of the lower class and women. Swami Dayanand tried his best to eradicate the social evils that persecuted women. He assigned the highest rights to women in domestic affairs and advocated for treating men and women alike in all cases. For this, the Arya Socialists published and distributed tracts and pamphlets and created more awareness among the public. Dayanand conceived an open social system with education and but in the process of formation of ideas, the Arya Samaj and his followers could not move beyond patriarchal activities. They only demanded limited and controlled liberation of female folk. However, the Arya Samaj took some initiative for the upliftment of women.



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