

Contribution of Arya Samaj in Women Upliftment: A Historical and Legal Reference

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During a crucial era in India's cultural and social history, the Arya Samaj was instrumental in promoting women's empowerment. The purdah regime, lack of educational opportunities for women, child marriage, and other urgent issues were the focus of the movement, which had its origins in Vedic principles. This article takes a look at how Arya Samaj was instrumental in breaking down barriers for women in India during a time when society was very conservative. The Arya Samaj supported gender-inclusive religious practices, created educational institutions for women, and opposed practices like child marriage and purdah by bringing Vedic principles back to life. Education and cultural reform empowered women, despite social opposition, and these initiatives brought about substantial change. In this study, we place Arya Samaj's work in the context of social change more generally, looking at how it shaped feminist movements in the modern era and how it continues to this day to advocate for gender equality and inclusion. Despite facing resistance in a patriarchal society, the Arya Samaj's contributions were transformative, providing a foundation for the legal and social reforms that followed, and continuing to influence contemporary discussions on women's rights and equality. At last, this paper highlighting area where the current legal framework continues to fall short.

1. Introduction

In ancient India, women held a special place in society. But this status of women took a serious hit throughout time, and now women are caught between two poles: on the one hand, they enjoy the grandeur of goddesses, and on the other, they are victims of countless ills that society has to offer. This fall is a result of the sexism that has grown up in our culture over the last several hundred years. As a result of their perceived lack of intelligence and competence, women are expected to stay at home and take care of the children and the household. Women endure a lot of obstacles in their daily lives that are limiting their growth, despite the fact that women are seen as the backbone of the family and society. People all over the world have taken notice of the push for women's empowerment since this reality became apparent. (Walia, Rishabh & Chauhan, Laxmi. 2021).

The term "empowerment" can refer to any strategy that helps people or groups become more self-reliant and independent. Therefore, empowering women entails helping them reach their full potential, giving them more autonomy, and giving them a voice in policymaking so that

they may aid in national and societal progress. In a nutshell, women's empowerment may be defined in a number of ways, including the following: the ability to make positive changes in one's own life and the lives of one's family and friends; and the respect and dignity that women deserve (Ramesh 2023). Factors in empowering women are economic opportunities and educational attainment. From what we can see in the past, it's clear that many reform movements have contributed significantly to women's emancipation. The status of women and society at large has been significantly restructured thanks to reforms implemented by many Samajs, including BrahmoSamaj, AryaSamaj, PrarthanaSamaj, DevSamaj, and countless more. This research paper examines the history and philosophy of Arya Samaj, a women's emancipation movement in India, and the importance of education in addressing these challenges. It focuses on the current state of women in Indian society.

At a time when women were oppressed, illiterate, and subjected to broad discrimination, the Arya Samaj saw the pressing need to combat practices like child marriage, dowry, gender inequality, and the suppression of women's access to education. Its reform goal was groundbreaking for its period since it aimed to educate and empower women while simultaneously working to eliminate long-established patriarchal norms that limited their autonomy and respect (Maitra, Rekha 2020).

Progress in society could not be achieved, according to the Arya Samaj, unless women were actively involved and empowered. The movement was a ray of hope for women's emancipation since it fought for equal opportunity, property rights, widow remarriage, and women's education. Arya Samaj was instrumental in changing people's views of women through launching public awareness campaigns, social changes, and educational institutions.

This research looks at the ways Arya Samaj has helped women throughout the years, particularly in the areas of education, social reform, and reclaiming women's rights. It emphasizes how their endeavors aided in India's larger socio-cultural awakening and how they changed the lives of innumerable women. This article highlights the essential role of the Arya Samaj movement in promoting gender equality and social justice in colonial and post-colonial India by examining the historical context and lasting impact of their achievements (Sushma 2023).

2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ARYA SAMAJ

Swami Dayanand made a monumental and far-reaching decision during his 1875 visit to Bombay. In making this decision, the "Arya Samaj" came into being. In order to spread his message and effect change in northern India, he founded this organization. Its subsequent impact on Hinduism and Indian nationalism was substantial. For quite some time, Dayanand had been thinking of starting his own company. He had tried to start a society before, many times. Amah in 1872 and Banaras in 1874 were also fruitless endeavors. On January 16, 1875, he established the Arya Samaj in Rajkot; nevertheless, it did not achieve success. In January 1875, he made yet another unsuccessful attempt to create an Arya Samaj chapter in Ahmedabad. But on April 10, 1875, in Bombay, he established the Arya Samaj. Everything went swimmingly. In Bombay, a confluence of factors allowed him to restart his efforts to advance the Arya Samaj. Dayanand may have also honed his organizational and planning

abilities since the beginning. He had fully formed his views on reform at this point. His pedagogical tenets are laid out in his book *The Satyarth Prakash*. It is the duty of parents, he says, to bring up children who are both intelligent and morally decent. He advocated beginning the study of Sanskrit and Hindi, among other languages, at the age of five (Yadav, Prabin 2023).



Figure 1: Founder of Arya Samaj

(Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-daily-current-affairs/prelims-pointers/dayanand-saraswati/>)

He used three languages in his formula. He also thought that parents should teach their children social skills and reprimand them appropriately. Dayanand was against coed schools but for intensive education for boys and girls starting at age 8. All pupils are required to study Bhramakharya. Nonetheless, Dayanand pushed for educational equality between the sexes. He vehemently opposed the practice of child marriage and pushed for the legal marriage of boys at the age of sixteen and girls at the age of twenty-five. The vow to "reclaim" Hindus who had converted to other faiths (e.g., Islam, Christianity, etc.) was one of the most remarkable and consequential things that Dayanand did. The "Suddhi" rite, a ritual of cleansing, often included large crowds performing this. Many important questions arise from the establishment of Arya Samaj. What role did Dayanand hope to play within the Samaj and how did he see the organization fitting into society? Could you tell me who was interested in joining this group and what drew them to it? How did the Arya Samaj come to be, and what were the principles upon which it was based? Now we will address these questions. You may say that Dayanand wanted to bring together all Hindus who shared his desire for social and religious reform and his conviction that Hinduism needed a return to Vedic religion. By banding together, these individuals would have a greater chance of helping one other and impacting society at large. Swami Dayananda was not interested in gathering followers in order to propagate his teachings. Reform, in his view, had to come from within the people. It is the duty of the people to work for their own and society's improvement. Although Dayanand would not assume the role of people's leader, he would be available to them at all times, either through his writings or personal visits, to offer advice. Given his self-awareness, he flat-out refused to take on the role of Guru to even one follower. Several of Dayanand's statements lead us to believe that he never considered his position in the Samaj as a position of authority. He envisioned the Samaj growing into a vast, welcoming organization that could unite all respectable Hindus in devotion to the Vedas, the holy book of Hinduism, rather than becoming a secret sanctuary for

a select few. As the Samaj grew in the years that followed, Dayanand's fundamental feelings toward it became more solid (Virk, Hardev 2021).

The gathering and discussions that led to the establishment of the Samaj did not occupy a significant portion of Dayanand's time because he was busy preaching, teaching, writing, and establishing Arya Samajis across India. Over time, the public lecture became his principal means of imparting knowledge. The historical achievements of the Aryan people, the Vedic revelations, moral teachings, the advancement of racial division, and the teachings of God and the soul were the main points of his message that he had emphasized. Holding long Q&A sessions after his lectures or disrupting their flow had always been something he was nervous about (Om, Prakash & Singh, Om 2024).

3. KEY FOCUS AREAS OF “ARYA SAMAJ”

Gender parity, fair treatment of men and women, and the belief that everyone should have the chance to succeed based on their own unique combination of innate abilities, past actions, and future choices are central to Arya Samaj's ideology. After Swami Dayanand's death in 1884, a revised and extended edition of his excellent work "Satyarth Prakash" was published, further elaborating his distinctive ideas. The original publication was in 1875. Returning to the Vedas became his life's work. It was in the second part of the nineteenth century, when Swami Dayanand started his work, that he noticed the downfall of Hindu society. Covered with so many superfluous traditions, it had transformed into a massive, immobile, fossilized creature. Along with other important causes, such raising public awareness via education, Arya Samaj worked to improve the lives of the lower classes and women, who were considered to be on par with males in terms of shastric rank (Rai, Lajpat 1967).

The status of women was dismal when the Arya Samaj was established. They had fallen from their lofty social and familial status. As a result, women started relying on their male relatives to keep Purdah. They shifted from monogamy to polygamy as early marriage became nearly ubiquitous. In their fight for women's emancipation, Swami Dayananda and the Arya Samaj were just as fearless and generous. The total liberation of women was a cause that both spoke out for. (O'Malley et al., 1946) They fought for the right of women to receive an education. They shared Annie Besant's belief that educating India's women was the key to the country's revival. They argued that India would stay weak until its girls received an education, were taught and trained, knew her history's glory and taught the younger generation what India was and could be, until Indian mothers were as respectable as their foremothers, became as patriotic as men, and loved her land and husbands just as much as they loved their children. (Saraswati, Dayananda 2014) Dayananda and his Samaj advocated for a specific kind of education for girls and women. O'Malley made the astute observation that feminism and nationalism were inseparable. The Samaj held the view that girls and boys should have access to quality education on an equal footing. According to this belief, the home would become a battleground for the gods and demons and a miserable place to live if either men or women had higher levels of education. According to Dayananda, women from the Vaishya caste should study trade, women from the Kshatriya caste should study all sciences, and women from the Shudra caste should master the art of service. It is imperative that women acquire the same foundational knowledge in mathematics, art, science, and religion as males do, in addition to the rules and

regulations of their chosen career. It was impossible to determine what was right and wrong, how to treat the husband and others, how to run the household, how to make food in a sanitary way, how to prevent disease, and how to ensure happiness in the family without this much (Kaur, Inderjit 1983).

Dayananda established the Arya Samaj on 10 April 1875 after delivering a comprehensive blueprint for the modernization of Indian society. He hoped that by doing so, he could successfully finish this enormous undertaking. Its membership was open to anybody who was willing to accept the following beliefs and had a strong confidence in God in "His blessed worlds," the Vedas, regardless of caste, creed, or religion (Singh, Sita Ram 1995):

- One must always be prepared to embrace truth and reject falsehood.
- One must act in accordance with dharma, meaning after weighing the pros and drawbacks.
- Bringing about positive change in people's lives on all levels—physical, spiritual, and social—was the primary goal of the Samaj.
- Everyone should be treated with kindness and fairness, regardless of their circumstances.
- The spread of knowledge should replace ignorance.
- Everyone should consider the advancements made by others as their own, rather than being satisfied with just their own personal progress.
- Everyone should think of himself as obligated to follow norms that benefit society as a whole, but everyone is free to act according to his own desires when it comes to his own health and happiness.

4. REFORM MOVEMENTS INITIATED BY ARYA SAMAJ FOR WOMEN

After Swami Dayananda Saraswati established Arya Samaj in 1875, it became a major player in India's social reform movement, with a focus on ending women's subordination. It advocated progressive reforms based on Vedic ideas and aimed to elevate women by critiquing repressive customs. In order to empower women, society had to change its views on them, and these reform movements played a key role in that.

Abolition of Child Marriage

Child marriage, which was common in 19th-century India and put young girls through painful weddings at a young age, was one of the major changes fought for by Arya Samaj. Leaders of the Arya Samaj fought hard to have this practice outlawed, saying it was incompatible with respect for human dignity and the teachings of the Vedas. They stressed the significance of education and physical development before marriage and pushed for an earlier marriage age. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 was one of several laws enacted as a result of this movement, which struck a chord with liberal intellectuals (Ganguly, Enakshi 2015).

The sin of underage marriage contributed more to the decline in society's standards. Since infant marriage was the root of so many problems, Swami Dayanand waged a protracted fight

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to end the practice. Swami Dayananda declared in his Satyarth Prakash, "That nation descends into the depths of despair wherein the people do neither practice brahmacharya nor acquire wisdom, where early marriage and marriage between the inappropriate and prevalent Females should marry between the ages of 16 and 25, and males should do the same between the ages of 25 and 48, according to Dayanand. Child marriage was also denounced by Swami Dayananda Saraswati as anti-Vedic, in addition to the physical grounds. He argued that child marriage should be outlawed and that Brahcharya should be codified into law. In addition to advising that both partners reach an appropriate level of physical and mental maturity before getting married, Swami Dayanand said that the wedding should only take place with their permission. The age of consent was raised from twelve for unmarried girls to fourteen for married ones in a 1925 revision of the 1860 ordinance that dealt with child marriage. The Arya Samaj deserves praise for its successful campaign to change public opinion in opposition to this unnatural practice (Plesons, Marina et al., 2021).

Promotion of Widow Remarriage

Severe restrictions, such as social exclusion and loss of rights, were associated with widowhood in traditional Indian society. Arya Samaj fiercely fought against this prejudice, advocating for widow remarriage to give widows a sense of purpose and dignity again. By publicly celebrating second marriages, the Samaj was subverting both social mores and religious dogma. As a result of these initiatives, widow remarriage became more socially acceptable, giving many women a second chance at life (Johnson, Emmanuel & Shyamala, Mrs 2012).

The widow remarriage campaign has Swami Dayanand's unwavering backing. Even married women whose husbands were living could practice Niyoga on behalf of an impotent spouse, according to Swami Dayanand. In an effort to raise people's levels of awareness and acceptance of widow remarriage, the Arya Samaj movement printed and distributed a large number of leaflets. Swami Dayanand advocated for widows' right to remarry during a meeting with Brahmo Samaj leader Keshav Chandra Sen in Calcutta. If a widow wishes to remarry, she ought to be permitted to do so, according to Swami Dayananda's beliefs expressed in Dharmatattva. There were two types of widows in that era: those who divorced when still young and those who became widowed after reaching sexual maturity but never had sexual relations with their husbands. At this period, remarriage was always preferred for widows who fell into the first category. Tracts such as Munshi Jiwan Das's "Sada-I-Haqq" (The voice of Truths) and Pandit Lekh Ram's "Risala-I-Nawid-Begwan" (A treatise conveying joyful tidings for widows) were supported by the Arya Samajees of Amritsar, Lahore during that time, and they helped to build public opinion. Widow remarriage was organized by Arya Samaj leaders in 1882. An Arya Samajee-arranged chutree-caste remarriage took place in the Gurdaspur area of Punjab. "Vidhwa Sahayak," "widow cause," and "Vidhwa Bandhu" were the names of the Arya Samaj's quarterly publications that advocated for widow remarriage at the time. The Rig Veda can be cited in favor of a widow's right to remarry or in the event that her husband passes away, the woman might claim her child as her own and give it to her second spouse, who welcomed her. Swami Dayanand was eager to raise women's position to that of males and his beliefs were quite progressive. Here we have a selection of novels that advocate for widow remarriage. "Vidhwa Vivah mimansa" was penned by Ganga Prasad Updhyaya (Bhat, Rashid & Gamage, Lakmini (2023).

In numerous shastrarthas involving widow remarriage, the Arya Samajis of Agra prevailed over the Sanatanis. The Arya Samaj movement's Satyarth propaganda sparked a psychological revolution in society, even though widow remarriage was not practiced in great numbers during that time. On 10 December 1914, the Vidhwa Vivah Paracharni Sabha in Saharanpur arranged for the remarriage of a child widow from a Vaisya household, and the Arya Samaj also founded "Vidhwa Ashram" (a home for widows) and "Vidhwa Vivah Pracharni Sabha" (a society for preaching widow remarriages) in several other areas. Muzaffarnagar was the site of the remarriage of the daughter of a widow on December 31, 1914. Lahore, Mathura, and Haridwar all have Ashrams that welcomed widows, where women may stay and even be married again. Sir Ganga Ram established the Vidhwa Vivah Sahayak Sabha (1915), a society that helps widows remarry. Mahatma Hans Raj helped get the Nabha States to pass a law allowing widows to remarry, which was a big deal for the upper castes in Punjab. In his 1895 pamphlet "Kshatra Dharam Palan ka gair Mamuli Mauka," Mahatma Munshi Ram (Swami Shardhanand) likewise advocated for widow remarriage. The Vidhwa Ashram, also known as Banita Ashram, was founded in the areas of Agra, Dehradun, and Bareilly in western U.P. by the Arya Samaj. The remarriage and vocational and educational training provided by these ashrams helped hundreds of widows. After initial resistance to Arya Samajist efforts subsided and widows' conditions improved, many individuals and organizations outside the Arya Samaj movement also joined hands with the Arya Samaj workers (Kapur, Radhika 2018).

Opposition to the Purdah System

Additionally, Arya Samaj aimed to eliminate the purdah system, which mandated women's veiling and isolation. According to the Samaj, the purdah system was in direct opposition to the egalitarian and dignified principles espoused in the Vedas and severely limited the independence and potential of women. The leaders of the Arya Samaj movement raised public awareness, called for women to participate more fully in school and public life, and urged them to remove the headscarf. For women, this was a watershed moment in their fight for equality (Haque, Riffat 2020).

Eradication of Sati

The Arya Samaj was vehemently against the sati ritual, which involved forcing or coercing widows to commit suicide by setting fire to their husband's burial pyre. Arya Samaj persisted in their fight against any lingering vestiges of this savage practice, even though Lord William Bentinck had previously formally outlawed it. In doing so, it enabled widows to regain control of their lives and rights by disproving the religious grounds for sati using Vedic scriptures (Alam, M et al., 2009).

Advocacy for Women's Education

Education, according to Arya Samaj, was the first step in achieving gender parity in power. It empowered women by establishing a network of schools and other educational institutions where they could get education, training, and the self-assurance to pursue their own goals. To ensure that women could make positive contributions to their families and communities, these schools typically offered a curriculum that blended traditional values with modern knowledge.

Equal Rights in Property and Social Status

The Arya Samaj also supported the then-revolutionary idea of equal property rights for men

and women. According to the Samaj, the ancient Vedic scriptures state that women should have the same rights as males when it comes to family property. Arya Samaj added to the conversation about women's legal rights and fought against the patriarchal system of inheritance by taking up this cause (Paul, Pintu 2020).

Social and Religious Reforms

The Arya Samaj rethought religious rituals in order to include more people. It opened the door for women to do yajnas, recite Vedic mantras, and take part in rites that had previously been restricted for males. Doing so, Arya Samaj dismantled obstacles that kept women in subordinate positions in society and religion.

Arya Samaj's revolutionary reform movements for women tackled the societal inequalities of the day. Many women's lives were bettered as a result of these initiatives, and Indian society as a whole was changed for the better. Arya Samaj reclaimed India's spiritual and cultural roots by grounding its reforms in Vedic ideas, which prevented them from being perceived as foreign invaders. A more egalitarian society was made possible by this strategy, which gained extensive support (MATTA, MARA 2016).

5. EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARYA SAMAJ IN WOMEN'S UPLIFTMENT

In the 19th century, caste was the determining factor in Indian society's educational system. Even though education was available to a small number of males from higher castes, the vast majority of women of that era were illiterate. School was not provided to many youngsters, particularly girls. Institutions such as traditional mosques, paathshalas, madrassas, and Gurukuls were used to teach the masses. Science and technology were not part of the curriculum; instead, students received religious instruction alongside more traditional academic disciplines such as Sanskrit, grammar, mathematics, philosophy, and religion. The culture was rife with superstitious practices. There were societies that strictly forbade girls from receiving an education. It was important to encourage female education because, contrary to popular belief, educated women would not become widows after marriage. Instead, the real reason Indian culture was socially and religiously behind was due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. Removing societal problems and spreading education were the goals of the Arya Samaj movement. The Arya Samaj sought to eradicate orthodoxy and darkness from society by emphasizing the elimination of illiteracy. It laid the groundwork for several schools in India, catering to the needs of both sexes. In the realm of education, the Arya Samaj was evident; while some schools favored a more conventional approach, others saw the merit in modernism and English instruction.

Educational reforms that sought to elevate women were pioneered by Arya Samaj, led by the visionary Swami Dayananda Saraswati. The Arya Samaj placed a heavy focus on ensuring that women had access to high-quality education because they believed that this would be the best way to free themselves from oppression and dependence. Literacy was only the beginning; these initiatives also sought to create conditions in which women could reach their full potential and assert their legitimate position in society (Gupta, Pawan 2024).

Prior to Maharishi's attention, there was no way to focus on women's education. The Maharishi
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believed that all humans had an urgent need to learn the Vedas. "All men and women, that is, human beings have the right to read the Vedas," he writes in an article praising female education. This Shruti is all in your head, and you tumble into the well. Not based on any reliable source. Vedic proof has formed the foundation of Maharishi Dayanand's arguments. (26-2) This is the passage where the Lord is told, "I preach the welfare speech of the Vedas for all human beings, so do you also." A good education is seen to be crucial. According to what the Maharishi has said, everyone can learn to be happy by studying the Vedas, which will lead to more scientific understanding, more acceptance of good things, less attachment to evil things, and an end to suffering. God has made everything that we need—earth, water, air, moon, sun, food, etc.—and the Vedas are available to everyone. However, in places where they are outlawed, it means that nothing good should come out of reading or teaching them. His status as a Shudra is a reflection of his naiveté and lack of intelligence.

Establishment of Girls' Schools and Colleges

At a period when women's education was socially frowned upon and stigmatized, the Arya Samaj established a number of schools that were just for girls. By providing a contemporary education grounded in Vedic ideals, these schools empowered women intellectually and morally. Arya Samaj set up a number of Kanya Gurukuls (girls' schools) that offered a well-rounded education that drew from both contemporary thought and ancient Vedic wisdom. These establishments had the noble goal of fostering women into strong, self-reliant people. In addition to Sanskrit and Vedic scriptures, students also studied mathematics, physics, literature, and history, which helped them develop intellectually and spiritually (Joshi, Kanchan & Sharma, Neeta 2021).

Throughout India, the Arya Samaj set up a number of historic schools for female students. Among these institutions, the Kanya Mahavidyalayas (Girls' Colleges) stood out as important hubs for women's higher learning. Women were encouraged to pursue occupations and actively engage in society through the advanced learning opportunities offered by these universities in numerous areas (Pietkiewicz-Pareek, Beata 2019).

From its inception, the Arya Samaj advocated for the education of girls. As an outpost of the Arya Samaj orphanage, which was established in 1877, the first and, for a while, sole girls' school was situated at Ferozepur. In 1885, a girls' school was established by the Amritsar Arya Samaj. In 1890, the Arya Kanya Pathshala was inaugurated by the Jalandhar Samaj. Bibi Guru Devi was its inaugural principal. Established in the 1890s in Jalandhar, the Kanya Mahavidyalaya provided a unique form of education for girls and women so that they could meet the expectations of their more educated male relatives without sacrificing their cultural identity. The effort to allow women access to higher education was met with strong opposition from both the wider Hindu population and the Aryans associated with the D.A.V. schools. They worried about competition for the few resources accessible to Hindus and argued that this kind of schooling was unneeded. "A nation can never rise high without giving high education to its women. No reform can be brought in any field without bringing reforms in your women." This was the belief of the Arya Samajee, an advocate for women's education. Sewing, needlework, sketching, cooking, music, poetry, games, mathematics, cleanliness, and the sacred literature of the Samaj were among the many skills that the girls studied alongside basic literacy (Sahoo, Sanjukta 2016).



Figure 2: Kanya Mahavidyalaya

(Source: <https://www.kmvjalandhar.ac.in/sitepages/historical-past/>)

A new generation of educators emerged from the Kanya Mahavidyalaya. After finishing at Kanya Mahavidyalaya, the females went on to found other schools. An honorable occupation for women emerged in the 1800s as a result of Arya Samaj's activism. Many of those enrolled in the teacher preparation program were widows. A girl's education served dual purposes: first, as a professional preparation tool; and second, as a means to elevate her status within the arranged marriage system. A girl's readiness for marriage and motherhood was judged by her level of education in literate Hindu classes. As the need for female education grew in the 20th century, Arya Samaj established a plethora of more schools. A female Vedic school and an Ashram for widows were being run by the Ludhiana Samaj. A thriving girls' school was established by the Ferozepur Samaj. Girls' schools were also established by the Arya Samaj of Gujrat. Arya Samaj, even the most modest and financially strapped, was able to keep a girls' and boys' school running at Bhaghabanpura. Additional girls' schools established by different Arya Samajes include: Arya Putri in Pathshalas, Abohar (1903–04); Arya Girls' Middle School in Moga (1921); G.M. Arya Girls' Primary School in Patti, Amritsar (1933); Sain Dass AS. Girls' High School in Jalandhar (1942); and Shri Banwari Lal Vedic Middle Kanya Pathshala in Abohar (1944). Jalandhat was one of the places in Punjab where Arya Samajes established schools specifically for girls. Nevertheless, the Arya Samaj encountered numerous challenges throughout the colonial era, including a dearth of instructors, textbooks, and consensus on the curriculum (Puri, Shaifali 2016).

Here are a some of the famous places:

Gurukul Kangri for Girls (Haridwar): Inspiring women to build a solid cultural and ethical basis, this organization prioritized teaching Vedic education alongside modern disciplines.

D.A.V. Schools for Girls: In order to combine Western teaching methods with Vedic teachings, the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (D.A.V.) schools were founded. A high-quality education for girls was in high demand, and they met that desire.

Introduction of a Gender-Sensitive Curriculum

An inclusive and gender-sensitive curriculum was something the Arya Samaj fought for. Subjects taught in these schools helped women become more than just housewives; they were also equipped to be contributing members of society. To help women gain self-assurance and autonomy, Arya Samaj advocated for programs that teach them to think critically, take charge of their own lives, and rely on themselves.

Promotion of Sanskrit and Vedic Knowledge

After centuries of being largely excluded, Arya Samaj rallied women to learn Sanskrit and delve deeply into the Vedic literature. As a result, women were finally able to pursue theological and spiritual instruction, which was a huge change from the norm. In order to combat the misreading of religious teachings that frequently served to rationalize the enslavement of women, Arya Samaj educated women in the Vedic literature.

Vocational and Skill-Based Education

Arya Samaj advocated for vocational training in addition to formal education since they understood the practical demands of women. The programs taught women how to weave, tailor, and do other crafts, which helped them become economically independent. That was a huge step forward for women's equality and independence in the workplace, and it was spearheaded by Arya Samaj.

Awareness Campaigns and Educational Reform Movements

To persuade families that their girls should attend school, Arya Samaj ran awareness programs. These initiatives showed how education may help women and their families by addressing long-standing biases and removing barriers to education. Child marriage was one of the limiting practices that Arya Samaj's reform movements sought to eradicate because of the negative impact it had on girls' educational opportunities.

Focus on Moral and Ethical Education

Arya Samaj held moral and ethical education in the same esteem as academic achievement. Its stated goal was to instill in women a sense of social duty, self-control, and candor. Arya Samaj empowered women to make a difference in their homes and communities by educating them in these values.

Educational Upliftment of Widows

When it came to widows' need for education, the Arya Samaj was an early advocate. It set up specialized educational institutions and initiatives to help widows get back into the workforce or further their education. In addition to assisting widows in getting back on their feet, these programs worked to dismantle stigmatizing social standards.

6. EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Arya Samaj's Efforts in Breaking Social Taboos and Promoting Gender-Inclusive Rituals

Gender equality in religious and social customs was a cause that the Arya Samaj spearheaded by questioning long-standing societal taboos. The leaders of the Arya Samaj stressed the

importance of reform and inclusion during a period when patriarchal conventions controlled women's positions in society and restricted their involvement in social and religious rituals. They thought that empowering women and giving them equal rights in spiritual and social matters was the key to real social progress (Houth, Dr et al., 2023).

The Arya Samaj's reforms included gender-inclusive rituals as an important part of their agenda. Women were formerly not allowed to participate in important Hindu religious ceremonies, such as the holy thread ceremony (upanayana) or the Vedic fire rituals (yajnas). By promoting women's active participation in these rites, Arya Samaj aimed to eradicate these discriminatory practices. They argued that the sacred texts of Hinduism, the Vedas, uphold gender equality and do not forbid women from participating in religious activity. Arya Samaj leaders promoted a more welcoming religious culture by reinterpreting Vedic texts to give women their due role in spiritual pursuits (S., Sahana & Patil, Kiran Kumar 2022).

The Significance of "Shuddhi" and Its Impact on Women's Social Status

The Shuddhi (purification) program was a groundbreaking initiative of the Arya Samaj. For Hindus who had strayed from the faith, the traditional practice of Shuddhi was a cleansing and rediscovery of their faith. When it came to widows, outcasts, and women who had been socially condemned because of things like remarriage or conversion, Arya Samaj expanded this idea to help them overcome their social isolation. The Shuddhi movement was a symbol of societal acceptance, dignity restoration, and religious reconciliation (Reshi, Irshad & Sudha, Dr 2022).

As a means for women to regain their place in society, Shuddhi was an effective weapon. This initiative provided a way for widows, who were previously isolated and marginalized, to rejoin their families and communities. The leaders of the Arya Samaj group were fiercely against the discrimination that widows faced and strongly advocated for the right of widows to remarry. In addition to fostering societal harmony, the Shuddhi movement worked to dismantle gender and caste-based restrictions.

(Nayak, Purusottam & Mahanta, Bidisha 2009) As part of their efforts to demolish numerous regressive practices, Arya Samaj included women in the Shuddhi process and promoted their participation in ceremonies. They were able to stand up for themselves and their rights, and it also raised their social standing. A precedent for progressive reform was established in India through the combined efforts of breaking taboos and fostering gender inclusion, which had a lasting impact on women's empowerment (Nayak, Purusottam & Mahanta, Bidisha 2009).

7. CHALLENGES FACED BY ARYA SAMAJ IN WOMEN UPLIFTMENT

Because of the frequent collisions between the Arya Samaj's progressive ideals and long-established traditional and patriarchal standards, the organization's attempts to elevate women encountered formidable obstacles. The movement faced criticism from all quarters, including society and logistics, despite its good intentions and persistent efforts. Although frightening, these obstacles demonstrated how difficult it is to change people's mindsets and behaviors.

1. Opposition from Orthodox Groups

Orthodox Hindu groups' opposition was one of Arya Samaj's main obstacles. These factions
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fiercely fought against the Arya Samaj reforms, especially those that allowed widows to remarry, educated women, and included them in religious ceremonies. Opponents of the reforms said they were an attempt to dismantle the existing social order and went against traditional Hindu beliefs. There were charges of religious and cultural debasement leveled against attempts to educate women and incorporate them into Vedic ceremonies. Outright animosity towards Arya Samaj reformers occurred in rare instances, but public discussions and social boycotts were common outcomes of this animosity.

2. Social Stigma and Resistance to Change

Additional difficulty came from the patriarchal character of contemporary Indian society. Educating women or letting them leave conventional positions would desecrate their family heritage, according to many families, particularly in rural areas. Social and familial exclusion were common experiences for widows who remarried or for women who pursued higher education. Conservative households also resisted the Arya Samaj's calls for gender-inclusive ceremonies because they upheld traditional views of women's subordination.

3. Economic Constraints

Schools, universities, and widow shelters all needed large sums of money, which were frequently in short supply. Unfortunately, cultural biases against women's education and empowerment meant that community support and gifts were not always forthcoming to the many Arya Samaj institutions that relied on them. Particularly in economically depressed or geographically isolated regions, their programs' breadth and depth were frequently limited by a lack of sufficient finance.

4. Logistical Challenges in Education Initiatives

One of Arya Samaj's primary goals was to ensure that all women have access to education, but they faced numerous practical obstacles in doing so. Since many educated women encountered social constraints, there was a serious problem with the lack of competent female educators. Furthermore, it was necessary to create and implement relevant curricula that addressed societal preconceptions while balancing modern education with Vedic principles. Obtaining necessary texts and infrastructure was a challenge for many colleges as well.

5. Resistance to Widow Remarriage

A highly divisive topic was the practice of widow remarriage. Widowhood was seen as a perpetual condition of penance in many groups, where remarriage was seen as a sacrilegious endeavor. Extreme hostility, including social stigma and even banishment from their family, was common for women who remarried. Those within the Arya Samaj who advocated for widow remarriage were also the targets of verbal and physical abuse for daring to question long-established practices.

6. Caste-Based and Regional Variations

The Arya Samaj faced additional challenges due to regional disparities and traditions based on caste. People in rural areas were more likely to be conservative and opposed to change, in contrast to their more progressive urban counterparts. Further restricting the movement's inclusion were caste-based limitations, which typically determined whether women from particular groups could engage in reform efforts or have access to education.

7. Internal Conflicts within Arya Samaj

Progressive changes for women did not have universal approval among Arya Samaj members. Education, ritual participation, and social rights for women were topics of internal dispute. Fearing social reaction or the alienation of their supporters, some members favored a more measured approach.

8. Colonial Policies and Limited Government Support

Although the colonial government did not explicitly oppose Arya Samaj's reforms, they did not fully back programs that promoted women's education or widow remarriage. Education and government during the British era were typically modeled after Western models, which meant that indigenous reform initiatives had little chance of gaining traction or official support.

9. Balancing Traditional Values with Modern Ideas

Finding a middle ground between remaining true to Vedic ideals and embracing modern, liberal concepts was a huge struggle for Arya Samaj. Finding a way to address the concerns of both more traditional and more progressive elements of Indian society was a challenge for the movement as it attempted to modernize the country while simultaneously preserving its cultural and spiritual heritage.

8. LEGAL ASPECT OF ARYA SAMAJ

Arya Samaj's contributions to legal reform are notable in areas such as marriage, education, and social justice. The Arya Samaj's advocacy for codified laws, especially concerning marriage and women's rights, had a lasting impact on the legal system in India.

One of the most important legal contributions of Arya Samaj was the introduction of the Arya Samaj Marriage Validation Act, 1937. This act provided legal recognition to Arya Samaj marriages, which were conducted according to Vedic rites without adherence to caste, community, or religious barriers. The act ensured that marriages performed under Arya Samaj principles would be legally valid, giving legal security to inter-caste and inter-religious marriages (Agrawal, Anuja. 2020). This was a landmark step toward establishing the right to marry beyond the confines of caste and religion, which later influenced broader marriage laws in India, such as the Special Marriage Act of 1954. Arya Samaj also played a vital role in women's rights and gender equality. Swami Dayanand Saraswati strongly opposed social practices like child marriage, dowry, and the subjugation of women. The Arya Samaj supported laws that promoted widow remarriage, women's education, and the right of women to own property. Their advocacy contributed to the formulation of legislation like the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, which allowed widows to remarry, and influenced later laws related to women's inheritance and property rights. The movement's emphasis on the right to education for girls eventually found its place in the Constitution of India as a fundamental right to education.

The abolition of caste-based discrimination was another legal milestone influenced by Arya Samaj's philosophy. Swami Dayanand's call for "Back to the Vedas" emphasized the idea of social equality and rejected caste-based hierarchies. By promoting equality in marriage, education, and employment, the Arya Samaj laid the groundwork for constitutional provisions

for equality under Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination) of the Indian Constitution. Their efforts also contributed to the social reform movements that led to the Abolition of Untouchability under Article 17 of the Constitution (Om, Prakash & Singh, Om. 2024).

Another significant legal aspect of Arya Samaj's contribution is the right to religious freedom and reform. By challenging superstitious practices and promoting rational thought, Arya Samaj indirectly supported the legal framework for religious freedom guaranteed under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution. The movement's approach to Vedic reinterpretation supported the development of a more rational and progressive legal system where personal laws were challenged and reformed in favor of gender justice and human rights.

In summary, Arya Samaj's contributions to the legal framework of India are far-reaching. The movement's advocacy for codified marriage laws, women's rights, abolition of caste-based discrimination, and the right to education significantly influenced Indian legislation. The Arya Samaj Marriage Validation Act, its stance on widow remarriage, its advocacy for equality, and its support for social reform are all testaments to its enduring impact on the country's legal system. Through its social and legal reforms, Arya Samaj laid a strong foundation for constitutional principles of equality, justice, and dignity for all citizens.

9. LEGAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO WOMEN'S UPLIFTMENT IN INDIA

The Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, played a significant role in the social and legal reform movements in India, particularly in the upliftment of women. Its contributions to Indian laws concerning women's rights and empowerment can be seen through its progressive ideals and active participation in various reforms aimed at improving women's status in society. Some of the key contributions of Arya Samaj in the field of women's upliftment are:

1. **Promotion of Education for Women:** One of the Arya Samaj's core principles was the promotion of education, regardless of gender. Swami Dayananda Saraswati strongly advocated for the education of girls and women, which was revolutionary in the conservative social climate of the time. Arya Samaj established schools and institutions dedicated to educating women, emphasizing the importance of literacy and knowledge for women's social and economic independence.
2. **Support for Widow Remarriage:** Arya Samaj was one of the key organizations that supported widow remarriage during the 19th century. Swami Dayananda Saraswati believed that Hinduism, in its true form, did not support the social ostracization of widows. He was a strong proponent of widow remarriage, and his efforts helped in the enactment of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, a significant legal reform that allowed widows to remarry, which was a taboo in many sections of society at the time.
3. **Opposition to Child Marriage:** The Arya Samaj opposed child marriage, a widespread social evil in India, and promoted the idea that both boys and girls should marry at a mature age, which would ensure better mental and physical health for both partners. The Arya Samaj advocated for marriage at the age of consent, which contributed to the push for laws such as

the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 (also known as the Sarda Act), which raised the legal age of marriage for girls.

4. **Women's Right to Property:** Swami Dayananda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj advocated for the right of women to inherit property, which was traditionally denied in many parts of India. Although their advocacy did not directly result in immediate legal reforms, their promotion of gender equality in inheritance law set the foundation for later movements advocating for women's property rights. The Arya Samaj's emphasis on the rights of women paved the way for laws such as the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, which granted equal rights to women in inheritance.

10. FLAWS IN PRESENT WOMEN'S UPLIFTMENT LAWS: A COMPARISON WITH ARYA SAMAJ RECOMMENDATIONS

While the laws for women's upliftment in India have certainly progressed over time, there are several flaws that can be observed, particularly when we examine them in light of the reformist recommendations made by the Arya Samaj during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Arya Samaj, under the leadership of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, emphasized practical, progressive changes for the empowerment of women, including their right to education, inheritance, remarriage, and participation in social and religious practices. Below are some of the flaws in present laws and policies that could have been improved by incorporating Arya Samaj's vision:

1. Gender Inequality in Inheritance Laws

- **Arya Samaj's recommendation:** The Arya Samaj advocated for the equal inheritance rights for women, asserting that women should have the same right to inherit property as men.
- **Current flaw:** While the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 was amended in 2005 to give daughters equal rights in ancestral property, there are still significant gaps in the implementation of these laws. In practice, many women face resistance from families, societal pressure, and a lack of awareness of their rights, preventing them from asserting their inheritance rights. Furthermore, the system of joint family property can complicate the transfer of ownership to women, leading to underrepresentation in terms of property ownership among women.

2. Lack of Real Implementation of Widow Remarriage Rights

- **Arya Samaj's recommendation:** Swami Dayananda strongly advocated for the remarriage of widows, which was an essential part of Arya Samaj's teachings. He promoted widow remarriage as a right, breaking traditional norms that condemned widows to a life of isolation.
- **Current flaw:** While the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 allowed for the remarriage of widows, social stigma against widow remarriage persists in many parts of India. Widows continue to face societal discrimination and exclusion, particularly in rural and conservative areas. Additionally, the lack of emotional, social, and economic support often makes it difficult for widows to remarry and live independently. This reveals a disconnect between legal provisions and societal acceptance.

3. Limited Access to Quality Education

- Arya Samaj's recommendation: Arya Samaj believed that education was the key to empowering women and emphasized female education across its schools and centers.
- Current flaw: Despite various policies, such as the Right to Education Act (RTE), and the National Policy on Education, the quality of education provided to girls and women remains unequal, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. There is still a preference for educating boys over girls in many households. Moreover, the curriculum, facilities, and infrastructure are often inadequate in addressing the specific needs of women and girls. The disparity in the quality of education contributes to low literacy rates among women in certain regions.

4. Child Marriage and Age of Consent

- Arya Samaj's recommendation: Arya Samaj advocated for a delay in marriage until the legal and emotional maturity of both partners was achieved. It promoted the idea that marriage should take place only when individuals reached an appropriate age.
- Current flaw: Although the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 set the legal age for marriage at 18 for women, child marriage still remains prevalent in some parts of India, especially in rural areas, despite being outlawed. There is a lack of rigorous enforcement of the law, and societal pressures, poverty, and ignorance continue to perpetuate the practice. The Arya Samaj's call for widespread awareness and law enforcement could have strengthened efforts in eradicating this harmful tradition.

5. Lack of Female Representation in Religious and Cultural Spheres

- Arya Samaj's recommendation: Swami Dayananda Saraswati emphasized that women should have an equal right to participate in religious practices and rituals, which were often denied to them in traditional Hindu society.
- Current flaw: In many religious institutions and practices, women still face restrictions on participation. In certain temples, women are not allowed to enter or perform rituals, especially during menstruation. Though the Women's Reservation Bill is a step toward gender equality in political representation, the situation in religious spheres is still largely regressive. Women's access to leadership positions in religious communities and institutions remains limited, and laws that mandate gender equality in these spaces have not been effectively implemented.

6. Economic Independence and Employment Rights

- Arya Samaj's recommendation: Swami Dayananda stressed the importance of women being economically independent through education and employment.
- Current flaw: Though there are labor laws and affirmative actions, women still face significant barriers in achieving economic independence. The gender pay gap, underrepresentation in leadership roles, lack of employment opportunities in certain sectors, and issues like sexual harassment at the workplace prevent women from realizing their full economic potential. The Equal Remuneration Act has not been fully effective, as gender biases persist, leading to women being paid less for the same work as men.

7. Social Stigma Against Women's Autonomy

- Arya Samaj's recommendation: Arya Samaj advocated for women's right to make their own choices in life, be it regarding education, marriage, or religious practices.
- Current flaw: While laws like the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act exist, there remains a lack of comprehensive societal reforms to challenge deeply ingrained social norms that restrict women's autonomy. Women often find it difficult to make independent decisions, especially when it comes to marriage, career, or lifestyle, due to patriarchal societal expectations. Legal frameworks do not fully address these societal restrictions.

11. CONCLUSION

An important step Forward in the fight for gender equality in India was taken by the Arya Samaj. The movement, which had its origins in the rediscovery of Vedic principles, served to both combat backward customs and establish a foundation for female equality in an incredibly patriarchal culture. Arya Samaj successfully sparked a progressive intellectual and political upheaval that motivated subsequent generations by tackling important issues like religious tolerance, social justice, and women's education. As a result of the proliferation of educational institutions, women were able to gain the education and training they needed to overcome gender bias and other social barriers. In this way, women were able to maintain their cultural identity while actively participating in family, community, and professional life, thanks to the emphasis on both traditional values and modern learning. As a result of the movement's emphasis on education, more and more women were able to enter the field and teach others what they had learned.

Finally, in modern discussions of gender, the legacy of women's empowerment that Arya Samaj built through its campaigns for women's empowerment is still very much alive and well. Education, social equality, and cultural change were the three pillars upon which its progressive reforms rest, laying the groundwork for contemporary feminist movements in India. Arya Samaj is an example of how progressive principles have the power to shape a more equal and inclusive society. It is a historical reference that demonstrates this.

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