

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF ARYA SAMAJ IN EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN PUNJAB**DR. HARPINDER KAUR**Research Supervisor
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Guru Kashi University, Tanwandi Sabo, Bathinda**Abstract**

Indian society has been a witness of various social reform movements. Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, was a prominent movement which significantly influenced the Indian society. It has played substantial role in the emancipation of women by focusing on issues such as child marriage, widow remarriage, purdah system, gender and caste discrimination etc. with special emphasis girl and women education. Arya Samaj inherently consisted of two important aspects of women empowerment i.e. women development in terms of education and freedom from sufferings and equality of rights for women. Swami Dayanand believed that superstitions and fallacies prevailing in the society can be eradicated by educating women i.e. the empowerment of women with education. The present study highlights the origin and philosophy of Arya Samaj with special emphasis on its role in women emancipation with educational empowerment of women.

Key Words: Arya Samaj, social reform movement, emancipation, empowerment, education, Punjab

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Present research study was performed with the following aims and objectives-

- To highlight the origin and philosophy of Arya Samaj.
- To assess various problems faced by women in Indian society.
- To discuss emancipation and empowerment of women.
- To study the perception of Arya Samaj towards women and discuss its role in women emancipation with special reference to education of women in Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

Women in India had a distinct position in the society during ancient times. However with the passage of time this status of women suffered a major setback and today we find women amidst two extreme aspects, on one side women enjoy the eminence of goddess and on the other side women are victims of numerous evils prevailing in the society. This decline is the output of the specious thinking that has developed in the society towards women in the past centuries. Without considering the intellect and skills, women are

thought to be inferior to men and assigned the duties of taking care of children and family. Women are considered to be the supporting pillars of the family and society and they are facing numerous problems in day to day life which are inhibiting their development. Realizing this fact emphasis towards women empowerment has gained attention of the people around the globe.

Empowerment may be defined as the procedure or method to enhance the expanse of self-sufficiency and freedom in the lives of individuals or communities. Empowerment of women thus means to make women realize their potential, make them independent and enable them in decision making so that they can contribute in the development of the society and the nation. Women empowerment can be generally described in various perspectives such as dignity, authority to regulate their family and social life and their potential to bring about social reforms for the betterment of the society and the nation (Singh and Gupta 54). Education and economic aspects can be considered as most significant in women empowerment. It is evident from the historical evidences that various reform movements have played important role in the empowerment of women. Reforms introduced by Brahmo Samaj, Arya

Samaj, PrarthanaSamaj, DevSamaj and many more have greatly helped in restructuring the status of women in society and society as a whole itself.

The present research paper highlights major issues related to women in Indian society, role of education in such issues with special reference to the origin and philosophy of Arya Samaj and its role in women emancipation through educational empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

This research investigation is descriptive and analytical in nature. It discusses the role of Arya Samaj in reforming the education scenario in Punjab. In the study research papers, books, articles and conference proceedings were used for detailed analysis.

WOMEN ISSUES AND EMPOWERMENT IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Women have been facing numerous issues which prevent them from recognizing their true potential since long time. Some of the major complex issues are as follows-

- Social and domestic violence activities are very common. They face domestic beating, rape, dowry demands, abuse, molestation, sexual harassment in family and society etc.
- Gender discrimination such as predilection for male child over female child and female foeticide and infanticide, extra working hours without rest, are issues which have troubled women in middle and modern ages.
- Women health issues such as general health, recurring pregnancy, is not given much significance by women themselves, family and society.
- Educational and awareness issues are at the base of all issues as lack of education opportunities for women is a big hurdle in the path of women empowerment.

The term “empowerment” has been explained in various ways. It is now considered to be a way of controlling life according to one’s own wish. According to some it is a way of awareness for advancement. In context of the various problems associated with women in the society, various strategies of women empowerment can be

considered in present times, For example- social empowerment for improving social status, solving problems of gender discrimination, creating equal opportunities for women etc; educational empowerment for improving the level of education of women and creating awareness; Legal empowerment for curbing crimes against women; Political and economic empowerment so that women can actively participate in the social and political decision making (Singh and Gupta 56; Pratibha 138). Among all these, education empowerment is considered to be as of utmost significance.

Although the word “empowerment” is of recent origin but the inherent process or method behind is functional since long time. From the early 19th century, India has witnessed numerous socio-religious reform movements which have played significant role in restructuring the Indian society. The BrahmoSamaj, The Arya Samaj, The DevSamaj, Aligarh Movement, The PrarthanaSamaj, DevSamaj and Singh Sabha movement are some significant ones. Among these Arya Samaj was an important movement which greatly influenced people specially from the perspective of education.

ARYA SAMAJ’S ROLE IN WOMEN EDUCATION IN PUNJAB

Education was a medium by which colonial powers wished to retain their control over the colonies. In India, too British followed the same strategy to enhance their hold. As they were against the Indian traditional system of education, they experimented by introducing western culture and English language in Indian scenario so as to propagate their culture in the Indian soil. Punjab was also under the British government and similar activities were followed in this region. Female education was not given much importance during these times. Numerous social evils were prevailing in the society during these times. In the 19th century many socio-religious reform movement arose in India. BrahmoSamaj, Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha, DevSabha, Ramakrihna Mission were some prominent movements.

The term “Arya” in ancient terminology was used for cultured people and “Samaj” was used for society. Thus indicating a society for cultured people (Dua 33). Arya Samaj was basically a religious

institution or organization founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati on 10 April, 1875 in Bombay. The second was formed in Lahore, Punjab in 1877. This was a time when the Indian society was amidst the dilemma whether to follow the western culture supported by the new scientific inventions or to follow the age old Indian culture or tradition. The philosophy of Arya Samaj was based on the four Vedas and worked on revitalizing Hinduism. It was revivalistic, socio-religious movement with the objective of refurbishment of Vedic philosophy in place of Puranic ideology in the Indian society. Its main emphasis was on the social reformation of the society and development of ethical values in the young generation (Dua 33).

The in-depth philosophy of Arya Samaj was against social practices such as caste discrimination and idol worship. It favored women liberation, widow remarriages and self-government and is viewed as the most significant movement for the empowerment of women. In his book "Satyarth Prakash" published in 1875, women education and liberation are significantly mentioned. He writes about the right to education of girls and states that girls and boys education should be emphasized equally, although favors different boys and girls schools (Kishwar WS9; Kaur 837).

Arya Samaj was the first organization to initiate women and girl education. Lahore was the pivotal point of all the activities of Arya Samaj. In 1892, two groups of thoughts emerged in Arya Samaj, a Gurukul party and a College party. Gurukul group of thoughts favored only the Vedic education whereas the college group encouraged Vedic education along with western science and literature studies. In 1885, Amritsar Samaj started focusing on the construction of girl's school and maintaining them. They opened three girls school in Amritsar. Arya Samaj also started schools for girls in Lahore, Jalandhar (erstwhile Julundhur) but without any success. Numerous efforts were made by Jalandhar Arya Samaj in this regard but in vain due to mismanagement and lack of teachers and students. Finally in 1889-90 Jalandhar Samaj opened "The Kanya Pathshala" for girl's education which gave admission to widows and unmarried girls who were devoid of education earlier. In 1896, Kanya Mahavidyalaya was established, which was

more of an elaboration of the earlier pathshala under the leadership of Lala Dev Raj and Munshi Ram. The syllabus was designed to be limited, practical and safe for Hinduism. Along with basic literacy concepts, girls were also helped with skill development. Mahavidhyalaya's monthly magazine "Panchal Pandita" was also started in 1898 to spread awareness for women education. The basic aim of establishing Kanya Mahavidhyalaya was to develop the mental, physical and religious aspect of women. They also wished to create awareness for health and hygiene in women and thereby in society (Kaur 839; Vidhyalankar and Vedalankar 458; Sharma 813).

With the aim of providing education to girls who were far away from college and schools, first girl's hostel of Punjab was opened by the management of mahavidhyalaya. However, there was a big difference of opinion on the opening of Kanya Mahavidhyalaya between the gurukul party and college party. College party was against the opening of the Mahavidhyalaya. But later the college party understood the significance of women education which is evident from Lala Lajpat Rai's statement in which he was apologetic on his views regarding women's education. It was active participation of Girls from the Kanya Mahavidhyalaya under the leadership of Principal Lajawati in Swadeshi Movement, which changed Lalaji's perspective on women education. This changed perception of the college party led to the establishment of a girl's college in Lahore in 1927 under the affiliation of Punjab University (presently affiliated to Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar). After the demise of the eminent Mahatma Hansraj, this college was named as "Hansraj Mahila Mahavidhyalaya" in his honour.

In the post-Independence period, in 1964, Jalandhar Arya Samaj founded a new college "Banarsi Das Arya College" in Jalandhar Cantonment. Since then numerous schools and colleges have been established at various locations in Punjab. To empower women from the weaker sections of the society Arya Samaj operates various vocational study center which not only provide basic education but also give vocational training to women (Dhaliwal and Pathak 9). These centers established in Delhi, Faridabad, Haryana, Jharkhand and other places along with Punjab. The principle objective of

all these schools, colleges and vocational institutions is the empowerment of girls and women.

CONCLUSION

Thus it is evident that Arya Samaj was socio-religious reform movement with revivalistic characteristics. It was based on the philosophy of "back to vedas" or protecting Hinduism in colonial India. It laid emphasis on the eradication of many social and religious beliefs and practices which were hindrances in the development of the nation and at the same time promoted new and modern philosophies of widow remarriages, women education, prohibition of child marriages, equal opportunities for women etc. All the followers of Arya Samaj whether belonging to the Gurukul Party or the College party were in favor of education of women in the post-independence era. They established numerous schools and colleges for the educational empowerment of women. They also favored education for women of weaker sections of the society, widows and unmarried girls, realizing that women are an important part of the society and the nation, thus making significant contribution in women empowerment.

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