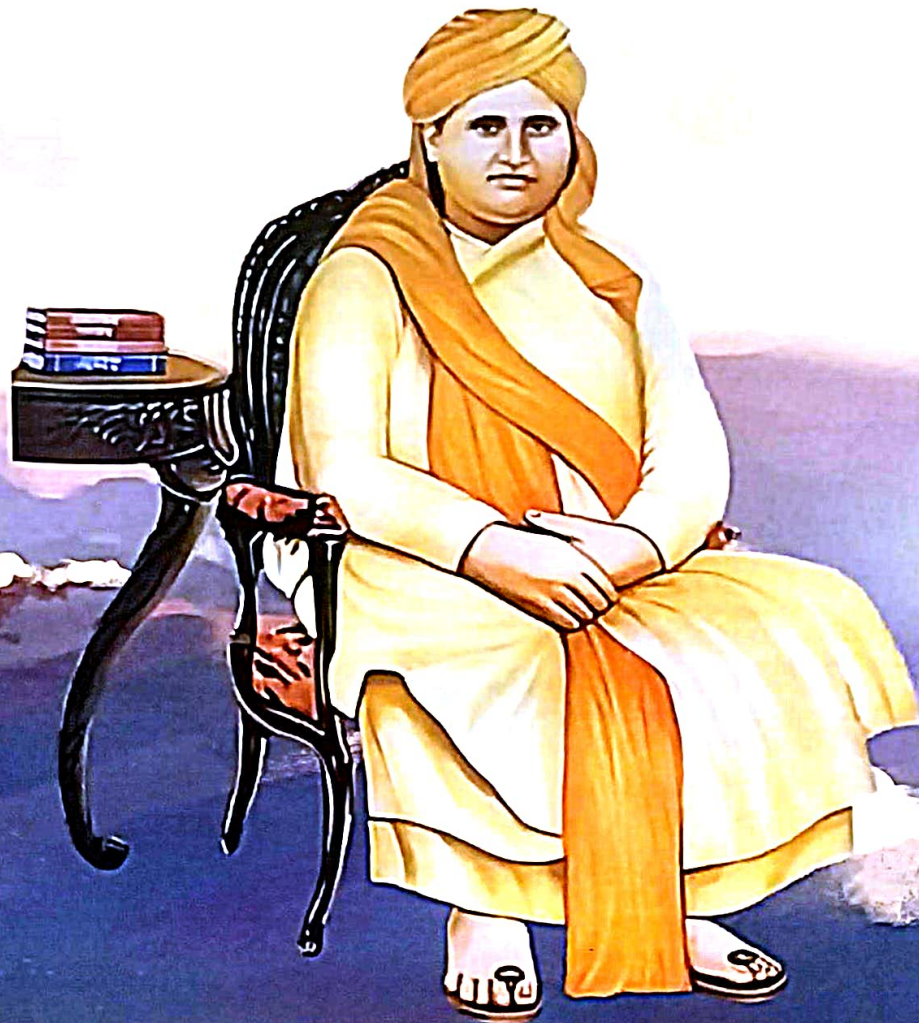


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## **“Relevance of Swami Dayanand Saraswati & Indian Nationalism”**



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Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Women Empowerment

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Numerous instances of saints, philosophers and Sanyasis stepping forward to lead society, initiate change and speak for the voiceless can be found throughout India's sociopolitical and religious history, dating back thousands of years. They stood up to British imperialism, gave lives, achieved immortality, and inspired succeeding generations. One such instance is the Sanyasis led Sanyasis revolt in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, they have given leadership, instilled self-esteem in the masses and persuaded society to make beneficial changes in various ways. Marashi Dayanand Saraswati belongs to that great tradition of saints and Sanyasis who lived at the time (1824-1883) when Indian society riddled with social follies was groaning the British subjugation. Although the great Sepoy Revolution of 1857 was unable to overthrow British rule, it did speak renewed sense of Indian nationalism. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was monitoring the nation and his fellow citizens very carefully, even going so far as to live a life of austerity in pursuit of genuine truth.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was one of the architects of modern India and the founder of Arya Samaj was born into a Brahmin family in Tankara, Gujarat, on 12 February 1824. Lalji Tiwari and Yashodhabai, his parents, were traditional Brahmins.

Mool Shankar Tiwari was his previous name

because he was born during Mool Nakshatra. For fifteen years (1845-60) he roamed as an ascetic in pursuit of truth. Dayanand's renowned work, *Satyarth Prakash* (The True Exposition) presented his opinions. *The Arya Samaj* is a reform movement of *Vedic Dharma*, and he was the first to call for *Swaraj* as 'India for Indians' in 1876. He was a founder of the Arya Samaj, a self-taught man who made a significant impact on Indian society and made a name for himself among a wide range of people. In 1875, he formally established the first Arya Samaj unit in Mumbai (then Bombay) and later the Samaj headquarters were established in Lahore. He was instrumental in the Indian independence movement and his teaching and efforts had a significant influence on Indian society. He was self-taught guy who built a name for himself among many different types of people. He made a lasting impression on India's cultural fabric with his unflinching dedication to social and religious change. As it is seen that Swamiji's social reforms played a pivotal role to lead the contemporary society progressively, his reforms for the voiceless women proved important because social injustice inflicted upon them as a weaker sex. My paper intends to focus Swami Dayanand Saraswati reforms regarding women empowerment.

In India, the road to gender equality and women's empowerment is one of



perseverance, hardship, and hope. Even though there have been notable successes in eliminating gender inequality, there is still a long way to go until deeply embedded patriarchy is completely destroyed and women's empowerment and gender parity are truly achieved in India. In general, women's empowerment is the process by which women develop the capacity to make strategic decisions and obtain authority and control over their own lives. It entails encouraging women to feel good about themselves, to make their own decisions, and to have the power to alter society for the betterment of both themselves and other people. On a larger scale, women's empowerment encompasses the three dimensions of socio-cultural empowerment, economic empowerment, and political empowerment, even if it involves empowering women in many different ways.

Women have always been valued in Indian society, as seen by the widespread worship of female deities like *Saraswati*, *Durga*, *Lakshmi*, *Kali*, and others. But since the *Vedic Period*, the patriarchal system has been in place, with traditions and rituals that favour men. Numerous extraordinary ladies, including *Gargi*, *Maitreyi*, and *Sulabha*, are mentioned in Indian history. Their capacity for reasoning was considerably greater than that of regular mortals. In a same vein, female monarchs such as *Prabhavatigupta* and *Rani Durgavati* have ruled over different regions of our nation. On the negative side, women have been silent victims of discrimination that has existed since antiquity. The Socio-Religious Reforms Movements of the 19th century marked the start of systematic attempts for gender equality and women's empowerment in India. Social reformers like *Raja Rammohan Roy*, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati*, *Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar*, and their affiliated groups contributed to the cause of women's empowerment and gender equality in India. (The Child Marriage

Restriction Act (Sarda Act) of 1929, the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, the Sati Abolition Act of 1829, etc.)

Swami Dayananda Saraswati vigorously opposed early marriage, polygamy, and untouchability while promoting universal education, gender equality, and women's empowerment. Swami Dayananda Saraswati played a crucial role in the emancipation and empowerment of Indian women, and for that, they should be deeply grateful. He made a solid case for giving women the status they had in Vedic times, using the authority of the Vedas and Manusmriti (without interpolations). In order to fight against oppressive customs and implement societal changes, particularly in the field of women's education, Swamiji drew heavily on the Vedas and Manusmriti in his writings. The primary driving factor behind the numerous reform programs of Arya Samaj pertaining to women's empowerment and Dalit upliftment was the spirit of Maharishi Dayananda and the different guiding concepts, such as the idea that women are not slaves but rather comrades, as stated in the *Vedas* and *Manusmriti*.

Swami Dayananda's inspired Vedic wisdom, which grants women a high status at home and in society, totally supported his efforts to alleviate the shackled and confined womanhood of India. Dr. Satya Pal Singh rightly observes in his article:

The advocacy of widow remarriage also went a long way in edifying the spirit of empowerment for women.

He asserted that *Yajnya* is an important vehicle not only for personal and environment purification but is also

essentially required for social unity. (Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati:

Reawakening Arsha Bharat in Amrit Kaal: ed:J Nandkumar: P, 11,12)

Regarding women's reforms, Dayananda fought the wicked customs of forced widowhood and child marriage,

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which he claimed were not authorised by the Vedas. His greatest concern was the plight of child widows in a society that forbade remarriage. Thus, he proposed widow remarriage and '*nigopa*', a temporary cohabitation of widows and widowers. A key role for education in Dayanand's worldview was integral to the '*prosperity of Aryavarta*' (India). Dayanand desired an education for the four classes of men and women, grounded in moral and religious principles. He believed that the king or state should bear the cost of this schooling. He advocated for universal education. He believed that this element was crucial to India's awakening.

He supported an educational system that prioritised grammar, philosophy, the Vedas, the sciences, medicine, music, and the arts. The Arya Samaj aimed to eradicate numerous harmful social customs in addition to reorganising the Indian mentality spiritually. The two main ones were women's education and widow remarriage. In the 1880s, the Samaj started initiatives to encourage widow remarriage. Maharishi Dayanand also argued against child marriage and emphasised the value of educating girls. For the good of society as a whole, he declared that an educated man needs an educated woman. The Arya Samaj aimed to eradicate numerous harmful social customs in addition to reorganising the Indian mentality spiritually. The two main ones were women's education and widow remarriage. In the 1880s, the Samaj started initiatives to encourage widow remarriage. Maharishi Dayanand also argued against child marriage and emphasised the value of educating girls. For the good of society as a whole, he declared that an educated man needs an educated woman.

Dayanand fought for women's rights. The Purdah system and child marriage were the norms of Hindu society. Widow remarriage was prohibited, and women's access to education was restricted. Dayanand voiced his opposition to all of

these injustices. He mentioned how important women were in the Vedic era. He therefore made the case for women's equality with males. He clarified that a lady who lacks literacy will be a burden to her spouse, kids, and the entire family. He placed a strong emphasis on women's education and made it possible for them to read at DAV colleges and schools. Additionally, he affirmed women's property rights. He argued against child marriage and in favour of laws to put an end to this immoral practice. Additionally, he denounced polyandry and polygamy. His policies helped to elevate women and gave them a moral boost. Dayanand thought that the path to spiritual and social advancement was knowledge. He highlighted the importance of a well-rounded education that encompassed both contemporary scientific knowledge and spiritual understanding. Dattatray Hosable aptly observes in his introduction of the book, he says:

To provide women with leading positions he created systems according to contemporary needs. He not only promoted women to study the Vedas

but also did the job of spreading women's education through Kanya

Pathshala and Kanya Gurukul" (Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati:

Reawakening Arsha Bharat in Amrit Kaal: ed:J Nandkumar: P, 02)

Additionally, he supported women's education since he thought it was essential to the moral and spiritual advancement of society. In order to give women a unique education that would allow them to adjust to the new demands made by the educated males of the family without sacrificing their cultural roots, the Kanya Mahavidyalaya was established in Jalandhar in the 1890s. It was the boldest and most radical attempt of its type, and it was also one of the most successful.

Conservative viewpoints both inside and outside the Samaj attacked and criticised



its founder, Arya Samajist Lala Devaraj, and his mostly female followers. Their fights and the resolution of the fundamental contradictions in the philosophy and practice of the Arya Samaj are important because they are representative of the heritage that women's education has carried forward from its inception in the eighteenth century. One of the first girls' schools in Punjab, the Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Jalandhar, is the subject of this case study. It evolved into a college and served as a model for women's institutions in many other regions in addition to Punjab. It was the result of the late nineteenth-century Arya Samaj religious and social reform movement. In order for girls to manage the challenges of daily life and avoid becoming the shadows of their husbands, he thought that they should be taught grammar, religion, medicine, mathematics, and other household skills in the same way that boys are taught these subjects and other sciences of practical application. He says, "A girl, who has followed the Brahmacharya for 24 years, and who has read the *vedangs* (i.e. *shiksha, kalpa, vyakarana, Nirukta, chhanda and jyotish*) and *upanga* (i.e. *mimamsa, vaisheshik, nyaya, yoga, sankhya, vedant and ayurveda*) is a Boon for the mankind and is respected everywhere." (Prasad, Durga, Satyarth Prakash -The Light of Truth. P.07) He supported the idea of separate schools or gurukuls for girls, which should only be staffed by women. Until they return from their academy with their educational program coming to an end, their marriage shouldn't be permitted.

He cited Vedic principles to demonstrate that women and men should have equal rights; members of the Arya Samaj participated in intercaste weddings and interdinners; he

placed a strong emphasis on women's education and established reading programs in DAV schools and colleges. He argued for women's property rights as well.

Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati's steadfast dedication to reviving Vedic knowledge, transforming society, and advancing reason has had a lasting influence on Hindu philosophy and Indian society. Through his efforts and the Arya Samaj he founded, he established a platform for the spread of Vedic beliefs, social justice, and education. Millions of people are still inspired by Swami Dayanand Saraswati's influence because it promotes justice, critical thinking, and spiritual development. His groundbreaking statement of everyone's equal right to education made him the first person of this period to enact legislation requiring universal education. He was the first Indian to advocate for the modern-day ideals of human equality and equal opportunity. The 19<sup>th</sup> century religious and social reform movements mark the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Indian nationalism.

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