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Shiv Lal Bhardwaj

Assistant Professor,
Department of History,
Govt. College Solan,
Himachal Pradesh, India

Arya Samaj: The crusader of education in Himachal Pradesh

Shiv Lal Bhardwaj

Abstract

The paper is an effort to traverse through the journey of Swami Dayanand Saraswati's dream of imparting low cost and quality education to Indian masses. He established Arya Samaj which took long strides in the fields of education in the late 19th and 20th centuries, by opening schools and gurukuls in every nook and corner of India, especially in Himachal Pradesh, spreading Vedic philosophy, uplifting the downtrodden subaltern Indian strata, eliminating every social and religious vices and countering the hypocritical education colonial proselytisation mission of the British. Light dawns at areas of darkness and the erstwhile Himachal Pradesh was like a symbolic 'dark continent' in the field of education, where the Arya Samaj ignited the light by giving education to boys and girls equally without any caste and creed discrimination.

Keywords: Arya Samaj, Educational, proselytisation, colonial, missionary, impart, encounter, *Vedic*, indigenous, populace, gurukul, cast

Introduction

The Arya Samaj true to its doctrine started its crusade against illiteracy and ignorance, advocated the equality of sexes by opening the hives of educational institutions all over India. Arya Samaj is a socio-religious movement founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati on April 10, 1875 at Bombay. 'Arya' means noble and 'Samaj' means society, so Arya Samaj refers to a society of noble people. It is the society of the Aryans, the pure *Aryavratees* (Indians), and the descendents of the old conquering race of the Indus and the Ganges. The prime objective of Arya Samaj is to do well to the world that is to promote physical, spiritual, and social good of everyone and move the Hindu religion away from the fictitious beliefs. As the motto of Arya Samaj signifies '*Krinvanto Vishvam Aryam*'; which means – 'make the world noble'. Arya Samaj was a revivalist movement in its character and took inspiration from the indigenous culture and awakened the true form of the Vedic dharma removing superstitions and meaningless customs. Therefore, Dayanand raised the slogan: '*Back to the Vedas*' and began an era of educational revolution.

Education is a trustworthy and significant gauge that measures the socio-cultural level of people of any country. It is a process of earning of learning, knowledge, values, skills and beliefs. It is a powerful quiver in which an individual can handle arrows like nice personality, high ethics, and positive emotions, good social and economic status. During the 19th century most of the socio-religious organisations focused on the moral, religious and ethical education, even though India was not educationally vibrant in this century, in spite of many educational styles and schools that existed. The British advent marked a new era in education when they introduced new education system, which proved non-conducive and not suitable for Indian mindset, however, Arya Samaj came out like a powerful catalytic agent in education particularly in Northern India.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati and other leaders of the Arya Samaj were of the opinion that message of the Vedas should be spread all over the country through education. They felt the need of educational institutions which would be useful to propagate the Vedic philosophy with modern scientific English education system. Even the death of Swami Dayanand did not restrict the spirit and progress of the Arya Samaj; rather it acted as a leavening factor. The Arya Samajists did a commendable work and opened a Dayananda Anglo – Vedic (DAV) High School in Lahore in June 1886 in which Vedic Hinduism along with the regular English-oriented curriculum was taught ^[1].

Corresponding Author:

Shiv Lal Bhardwaj

Assistant Professor,
Department of History,
Govt. College Solan,
Himachal Pradesh, India

This school became the torch bearer which developed into a college, and also became the patron of many educational institutions maintained by the Arya Samaj.

Arya schools grew up in many of the cities and villages. The schools established a reputation for providing low-cost, high-quality education. More importantly schooling along Anglo-Vedic lines provided the opportunity to learn within a secure Hindu environment. Previously, when middle class parents had sent their children to government and mission schools in order to gain Western education, they had always feared that this would lead to a conversion to Christianity. These anxieties were now banished ^[2]. The curriculum in these schools and colleges was not exactly in the original spirit of Dayananda, and so the more orthodox section of Samaj founded a Gurukul at Haridwar (Kangri). It was an institution to perpetuate the educational ideals of ancient India.

Before the advent of the Colonial Raj in India, education was imparted in purported indigenous schools - the Pathshalas and Chatshalas for Hindus, Madrassas and Makhtabs for Muslims and Gurumukhi schools for Sikhs, where the Pandits, Maulvis and Granthis respectively, bestowed some religious training and ostensible directions in dialects and maths. Then new forms of schools came in existence such as government schools, schools opened by rulers of princely states, missionary schools and schools run by socio-religious organisations. Government schools were run by the British government to create an army of clerks, who were clothed, bathed and steeped in western thought having gained the knowledge of the west. They knew two languages and served the requirements of the British. Similarly in the schools run by the rulers of princely states, the focus was on moral, religious and cultural values. Missionary schools were another form of educational institutes, which were established by the Christian Missionaries, who were the biggest allies of the British Government. They helped the government to spread the western education system which imparted very costly education. These schools were primarily the tools of proselytisation process in India. Christian missionaries "recommended two modes to converts the Indians that - by means of unaided and unconnected missionaries and through education..." ^[3] The British wanted to create servile Indian which they successfully did because young people of upper class were intoxicated to have learnt the English language and they not only aped the British mannerism and nuances but also chanted paeans of western culture with passion and zeal. The schools run by socio-religious organisations, such as Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj and Sanatan Dharam Sabha used to impart ancient knowledge of religion, rituals, cultures, scriptures and values of India.

As the Brahmo Samaj did great social reforms in Bengal, the Arya Samaj stimulated reforms in Punjab along with hill areas, doing benevolent social works and laid emphasis on education. During the British Raj, princely Hill States of Colonial Punjab were politically grouped in two parts: Simla Hill States and Punjab Hill States, which eventually became Himachal Pradesh after the Independence. Hills of Colonial Punjab as a whole were socially backward, economically poor and politically ignorant. Unfortunately education was also in dire straits, as only a few people could send their sons to the schools and sending the daughters to schools was like will-o'-the-wisp and unimaginable. The

primary reasons for this were the paucity of educational institutions in the region and difficult hilly and mountainous terrains causing its inhabitants to struggle hard for survival as they could not spare their wards fearing the loss of family earning, which made the condition of the education in this neck of the woods very bad.

The history of education of the locale of this research paper can be traced from the earliest schools which were very few in number, were run by the organisations mentioned above, however, people had to go to Lahore for better and higher education which was not affordable for the poor and lower class but still the downtrodden, the untouchable and women of erstwhile Himachal Pradesh were not getting any education at all. Then came the Arya Samajists like Sahi Ram Mahashaya (Rajgarh), Thakur Niranjana Singh (Touni Devi), Guru Ram Sharan (Chamba) and Shrimati Hardei (Kullu), etc., worked very hard in the field of education in the hills. Working against social evils, Arya Samaj fought a battle of survival to save Indian religion and cultural heritage from the invasion of the British Western education, which was hand in glove with Christian missionaries as they were brain washing and converting Indians. Many Indians got intoxicated with this education system and were influenced and lured by the economic benefits and social status but a sense of fear and panic run among thoughtful Indians, who started to think of improving and guarding India from cultural and religious onslaught. In Himachal Pradesh, the Arya Samaj had to battle at every step against this imposed education system. The following points would ascertain how the Arya Samaj countered the British strategy at every step in Himachal Pradesh:

- a. The British Christian Missionaries attacked the existing evils in Indian society. Arya Samaj took a serious responsibility on itself and made a vow to eradicate all social evils of India vis-à-vis exposing the hypocritical strategy of the Britishers and the Missionaries.
- b. The Christian Missionary and Government schools provided education to produce a legion of servile Indians and their educational institutes were invariably the places of proselytisation process. On the contrary the schools and gurukuls of Arya Samaj imparted not only quality education, but produced staunch patriots also, who later on became great freedom fighters in the independence struggle of India, and, Arya Samaj also played a very crucial role in stopping the conversion into Christianity and even was successful in reconverting the converted Indians into Hinduism from Christianity.
- c. The Christian Missionaries, the imperialistic historians and British bureaucrats denounced ancient Indian scriptures, cultures, traditions and religions as mere dogmas and superstitions, whereas the Arya Samaj's founder Swami Dayanand Saraswati propounded the philosophy of Vedas by raising the slogan "Back to Vedas", and as such Arya Samajists got inspired and opened gurukuls at various places where the Vedic literature was taught to the students and thus saved the Indian scriptures, treatises and rich cultural heritage.

Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) schools played a significant role in the social and political history of Himachal Pradesh. It revived the teaching of Sanskrit and Hindi along with English, and tried to synthesize the Eastern philosophy with

Western learning so as to keep abreast of all the latest educational developments happening around the world. So Arya Samaj accepted the entire existing educational structure of the government and also added the Vedic studies to it. Above all the Arya Samaj represented the new nationalism of India and provided educational facilities in their institutions to persons of all creeds, castes and classes. Besides D.A.V. schools, the gurukul system of education occupied an important place in Swami Dayanand's philosophy of education as gurukuls opened in the hills, were multidimensional indigenous education centers, grooming young citizens with values, culture and patriotism giving them ideals of discipline, morality, individualism, spirituality and overall personal development.

The British imperialistic people with a motive to expand the empire and the Christian Missionaries with the aim to Christianize the entire world targeted the vulnerable places in India in general and in Himachal Pradesh in particular where there were poverty and scarcity of educational facilities. Having all that in their minds they opened a number of educational institutions in far flung areas to seduce the innocent and ignorant *pahari* populace into the fold of empire and Christianity. But Arya Samaj sensed the state of affairs very quickly and opened schools and gurukuls wherever there were missionary schools. Arya Samaj gurukuls provided education almost free of cost to all irrespective of the background of the pupils. The following table testifies the truth of the above facts:

Table 1: Shows the difference between the Missionary Schools and Arya Samaj Schools/Gurukuls

Sr. no.	Region	Missionary Schools	Year	Arya Samaj Schools/Gurukuls	Year
1	Shimla District	Gorton Mission School, Kotgarh	1843	Himalyan Anglo Sanskrit Middle School, Dhada (Kotgarh)	1919
2	Shimla Hill States	Convent of Jesus & Mary School, Shimla	1864	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Sanjauli	1934
3	Shimla Hill States	St. Edwards School, Shimla	1925	D.A.V. School, Shimla	1938
4	Shimla Hill States	Loreto Convent Tara Hall, Shimla	1892	Arya Putri Pathshala, Shimla	1920
5	Shimla Hill States	The Lawrence School, Sanawar (Solan)	1847	Uma Kanya Arya Pathshala, Solan	1933
6	Shimla Hill States	Mission School, Theog,	1873	Arya Primary School, Theog	1923
7	Shimla Hill States	The Mayo Orphanage, Sanjauli	1869	Hindu Orphanage Industrial School, Tutikandi	1930
8	Chamba State	Sacred Heart School, Dalhousie	1901	Arya Samaj School, Chamba	NA
9	Panjab Hill States	St. Paul's High School, Palampur	1923	Arya primary School, Nurpur	1913
10	Panjab Hill States	St. Anne's Girls School, Palampur	NA	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Palampur	NA
11	Panjab Hill States	St. Hilda' Girls School, Kangra	1908	Gurudatt Anglo Vedic School, Kangra	1889

Swami Dayanand was of the opinion that daughters should be educated equally as the sons and he suggested separate schools for boys and girls. Thus co-education did not find the favour with the Arya Samaj in early years. Schools and Gurukuls were opened for girls separately. The Arya Samaj opened the schools and gurukuls for girls in various parts of Himachal Pradesh, which made people, feel comfortable and safe to send their daughters to these institutions, in view of the strict discipline there. Some of these schools attributed to the basic, practical and vocational education of

girls to make them self reliant. Later on these gurukuls and schools transformed into modern scientific educational institutions while they retained the basic character of the ideology of the Arya Samaj. Arya Samaj established different kinds of institutions for women such as Arya Putri Pathshala, Arya Kanya Pathshala, Kanya Gurukuls and Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya, etc. The list of girls' institutes (before 1947) in Himachal Pradesh is given in the table below:

Table 2: Shows the Name of the institutions its grade and its Region (District)

Sr. no.	Name of the institutions	Grade	Region (District)
1	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Dharamashala	Primary	Dharamshala (Kangra)
2	Arya Girls' School, Palampur	P	Palampur (Kangra)
3	Janki Kanya Pathshala, Dehra	P	Dehra Gopipur (Kangra)
4	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Garli	P	Garli (Kangra)
5	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Kangra	P	Kangra (Kangra)
6	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Pragpur	P	Pragpur (Kangra)
7	Arya Kanya Pathshala Shahpur	P	Shahpur (Kangra)
8	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Sanjauli	P	Shimla
9	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Kakla	P	Shimla
10	Arya Putri Pathshala, Shimla	P	Shimla
11	Uma Kanya Arya Pathshala, Solan	P	Solan

Arya Samaj did a remarkably commendable work in the field of education by opening a number of schools and gurukuls in Simla and Punjab Hills States of Colonial Punjab and Table. No. 3 shows the list of schools/gurukuls

in Simla Hill States opened by the Arya Samaj. Following table shows the list of schools/gurukuls in Punjab Hill States of Colonial Punjab, maintained by different managements as shown in the District Gazetteer, Kangra District 1924-25 ^[6]

Table 3: Shows Name of the School and place and Maintained by

Sr. no.	Name of the School and place	Maintained by
1	G.A.V Primary Girls School,Shahpur	G.A.V. High School Committee
2	G.A.V Primary School, Kangra Town	G.A.V. High School Committee
3	Primary Day School for Untouchables at Kaniara	Arya Samaj, Dharamashala
4	D.A.V. Lower Middle School, Dhira	Arya Samaj, Dhira
5	D.A.V. Primary School, Salari	Arya Samaj,Salari
6	D.A.V. Primary School, Chowk Bari	Arya Samaj,Chowk Bari
7	D.A.V. Primary School, Hati	Arya Samaj,Hati
8	D.A.V. Primary School, Umera	Arya Samaj,Umera
9	D.A.V. Middle School, Raipur	Local Managing Committee under the direct control of the D.A.V. High School Hoshiarpur Managing Committee.
10	D.A.V. Middle School Nagrota Surian.(1922)	Ditto
11	D.A.V. Middle School,Daulatpur (1923)	Ditto
12	Gopi Mal Anglo Middle School, Haroli (1921)	Ditto
13	Sud Anglo Sanskrit School, Garli (1922)	Ditto
14	Anglo Sanskrit Middle School Raipur, Kutlehar	Local Managing Committee
15	D.A.V. High School, Una (1907)	Arya Samaj, Una
16	Gurudatt Anglo Vedic High School, Kangra (1889)	Arya Samaj, Kangra
17	G.A.V Lower Middle School, Shahpur	G.A.V. High School Committee

Table no. - 4 shows Arya Samaj Schools in Kangra District^[7] of Punjab Hill States of Colonial Punjab and table no. -5 shows Arya Samaj Schools in Simla⁸ the summer capital of British Raj up to 1925. Both these tables show the kinds of

the schools, whether boys, girls or co-educational, the grade of the school with the strength of the students and teaching staff:

Table 4: Kangra District

Sr.no.	Name of Institution	Kind	Grade	Students	Teachers
1	GAV High School, Kangra	B	H	292	17
2	Town Primary School, Kangra	B	P	49	2
3	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Kangra	G	P	27	3
4	Arya School, Shahpur	B	L&M	64	3
5	GAV School, Suliana	B	M	78	5
6	Anglo Sanskrit High School, Gopipur (1919)	B	H	102	8
7	Lakhu Mal Primary School, Dehra Gopipur	B	P	34	1
8	Janki Kanya Pathshala, Dehra Gopipur	G	P	20	1
9	DAV Primary School, Dehra Gopipur	B	P	46	1
10	SAS Middle Schhool, Garli	B	M	80	5
11	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Garli	G	P	54	2
12	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Pragpur	G	P	37	2
13	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Dharamahala	G	P	37	3
14	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Shahpur	G	P	35	3
15	DAV Middle School, Raipur	B	M	64	5
16	DAV Middle School, Nadaun (1921)	B	M	76	5
17	DAV Middle School, Sujanpur Tira (1920)	B	M	71	5
18	DAV Middle School, Nagrota	B	M	59	3
19	DAV Middle School, Tikkar Aryan	B	L&M	156	7
20	DAV Primary School, Tauni Devi	B	P	25	1
21	DAV Primary School, Chamboh	B	P	31	2
22	DAV Primary School, Kakaryar	B	P	20	1
23	DAV Primary School,Khamtiana	B	P	40	1
24	DAV Primary School,Bari Khatrian	B	P	25	1
25	Hindi Pathshala, Hali	B	P	27	1
26	Hindi Pathshala, Ambehra	B	P	35	1
27	Sanskrit Pathshala, Hareta	B	S	25	1
28	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Kullu	G	P	31	2
29	Arya Middle School, Kullu	B	M	39	4
30	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Palampur	G	P	20	2
31	A.S. Middle School, Dhameta	B	M	25	3

{B-Boys, G-Girls, GK-Gurukul, C-College, M-Middle, H-High School, L&M-Lower Middle, P-Primary, W-Widow, D-Depressed Class, S-Sanskrit}

Table 5: Shimla District

Sr. No.	Name of Institution	Kind	Grade	Students	Teachers
1	Himalyan Anglo Sanskrit Middle School, Dhada (1919)	B	M	38	4
2	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Shimla	G	M	125	9
3	Khazana Mal Arya Primary School, Mashobra (1923)	B	P	60	2
4	Arya Primary School, Kufri	B	P	30	1
5	Arya Primary School, Theog(1923)	B	P	48	2
6	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Sanjauli	G	P	20	1
7	Arya Kanya Pathshala, Kakla	G	P	NA	NA

{B-Boys, G-Girls, GK-Gurukul, C-College, M-Middle, H-High School, L&M-Lower Middle, P-Primary, W-Widow, D-Depressed Class, S-Sanskrit}

Table 6: The schools and gurukuls in Princely Sirmour State are given on table no. 6:

Sr. No.	Name of Institution	Kind	Grade	Students	Teachers
1	Arya Pathshala, Fagu (Pajhota) ⁹	B & G	P	39	2
2	Arya Sanskrit Pathshala, Mashana Bag (Ser) ¹⁰	B & G	P	31	1
3	Vedic Ashram Pathshala, Sarhan (Nahan) ¹¹	B	P	22	1
4	Arya Gurukul, Garadi, (Bhogdhar)	B	P	14	1
5	Sarya Daram Pathshala, Narag	B & G	P	NA	1
6	Hindi Sanskrit Vidyalaya, Nohradhar	B & G	P	27	2

There were many Arya Samajists in Himachal Pradesh, who dedicated their whole lives to the cause of Arya Samaj. Some of them did commendable work spreading education in the region, one such assiduous Arya Samajist was Mahashaya Sahi Ram ji, who established two gurukuls in Rajgarh region in the early 20th Century. One Gurukul was opened for upper caste students in Fagu village named as Arya Pathshala ^[12] (because of the prevalent strong caste system) and another for lower caste students in village Mashana Bag (Ser) named as Arya Sanskrit Pathshala ^[13], which was also known as 'Koli School'. Sahi Ram was against caste system and to prove that he admitted his two grand-daughters Urmil and Nirmal in Arya Sanskrit Pathshala Mashana Bag (Ser) (Koli School) ^[14]. This was a strong message for the whole society, which believed in caste system. He was in favour of education for women especially of the lower castes. He used to inspire children to get education by moving in the villages of the area. People used to hide their daughters, because he used to take them to gurukul forcibly. In both of these gurukuls education was given on Vedic pattern, where Sanskrit was mandatory mode of speaking. In these schools caste discrimination was completely prohibited and from the admission register, it came to the knowledge of the researcher that 'ARYA' word was used in a column specified for caste ^[15]. Another Arya Samajist Thakur Niranjana Singh, a great votary of Swami Dayanand, spread the message of Vedic philosophy to far flung areas of Mandi, Kangra, Hamirpur and Bilaspur. He re-established the primary school at Touni Devi in 1920 and dedicated his entire life to educate the society ^[16]. Women Arya Samajists also did highly commendable work in the field of education. Shrimati Hardei ^[17] was one such devoted worker of Samaj, who defied all odds of social norms of the early 1920's of India, when going out of family fences was considered to be a very big blunder. She was the wife of the Swami Dyal of Sultanpur (Kullu) of Himachal Pradesh. She did teach in a Kanya Primary School Kullu. Another Arya Samajist Vimla Kuthiyala ^[18] of village Garli in Knagra got her early education in Arya Kanya Pathshala. She also got higher education in Sanskrit and Vedic literature from Arya Kanya Gurukul Baroda. She taught in Arya Kanya Pathshala for long time. It is concluded that the inception of Arya Samaj heralded an

era of educational change from orthodoxy to a progressive, scientific, rational and modern outlook. It was like a silver lining in the field of education amidst the dark clouds of prevalent social evils and colonialism. The dream of Swami Dayanand to impart quality education at very low cost to the deprived strata of society became a reality in Himachal Pradesh, where education was languishing miserably. The endeavors of Arya Samaj bore fruits of its hard work by educating *pahari* populace to counter the acts of missionaries' proselytisation process through education and religion in the Hills of Colonial Punjab.

Arya Samaj did a great works for the upliftment of girls by opening girls' schools and gurukuls all over Himachal Pradesh. Similarly for the lower caste people did a commendable contribution by *sanskritization* of many scheduled caste people. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Arya Samaj brought about the revival of education in Himachal Pradesh, keeping itself abreast of every latest changes and development happening around the world proving itself as a true crusader of education. It is still flourishing with its manifold magnitude and scaling new heights of excellence in education in Himachal Pradesh.

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