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# UNIT 26 MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS II — ARYA SAMAJ

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## 26.0 OBJECTIVES

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After you have studied this unit, you should be able to understand

- socio-economic conditions that needed reforms
- foundation, organisation and rules of Arya Samaj
- teaching of Arya Samaj
- major contributions of Arya Samaj
- Arya Samaj Movement and Modern India

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## 26.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we point out the need for reform in Indian society that was noticed and acted upon by the Arya Samaj. We start with the founding of the Arya Samaj, the rules of the Arya Samaj, and who were the first members. We then go on to the Arya Samaj movement with respect to reform. This is with reference to the challenges to Hinduism, the emancipation of women, and the role of Arya Samaj in politics. The material for this unit is derived from the books given in **Further Reading** at the end of the unit.

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## 26.2 NEED FOR REFORM

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Swami Dayanand the founder of the Arya Samaj was born in 1824, when India was ruled by the British. Dayanand was the son of a Brahmin father and mother. His education started at the age of five and in his 8th year he was invested with the sacred thread. Dayanand's religious transformation occurred when at the age of 14 he was asked to observe the fast of Shivaratri. Dayanand and his father went to a temple for the prayer and chanting mantras. As Dayanand watched a mosque climbed the statue of Shiva and then began eating the offerings. This set Dayanand off on his religious quest. He realised that the idol itself could not be the god himself. It was an age when means of transportation and communication were relatively primitive. There were few printing press or good news papers. The initial

fear of the British government was that press and modern education would create an atmosphere ripe for sedition.

During that period the Britishers adopted the policy of producing economically cheap English educated clerks on a mass scale to run the British administration in India. The basic motive behind this policy was to de-culturise and de-humanise English educated persons.

The important problems of those days was the problems created by British rule, and a host of other evils that branched out from colonial oppression of India. These included the threat of mass level conversion of the Indians to Christianity, the custom of untouchability that condemns Shudras to a sub-human existence, the low status of women, the purdah system, child marriage, illiteracy and also the most unfortunate Sati-system. These problems made Dayanand restless and uneasy. Further there was the problem of the growing pauperisation of masses as a result of the policy to reduce India to an agricultural colony of industrialised England.

#### Box 26.01

Dayanand's education was Vedic and his father was one of his teachers. His education began with the Yajur Veda (one of the four Vedas) and continued in Sanskrit learning the rules of grammar and their application. Logic, philosophy, law, and ethics etc. were also taught. But Dayanand was more than a student. He was a seeker after enlightenment. He brooded over the problem of life and death.

To help him get over his brooding a marriage was fixed for him, but a week before his marriage he ran away from home at the age of 21. He became a **sadhu** and never regretted it. For 15 years (1845-1860 A.D.), Dayanand wandered all over India, quenching his thirst for knowledge, by meeting scores of other **sadhus** and pandits. Dayanand completed his education when he met Swami Virjanand Saraswati. Swami Virjanand charged Swami Dayanand to purge Hinduism of all the evils that existed in it. He told Dayanand that he must enter the world as an independent teacher. He took a pledge from Swami Dayanand that he would devote his life to the dissemination of truth. Thereafter Dayanand spent his life honouring the pledge he had given to his **guru**.

The idea was that India would only produce raw materials for British factories, and serve as the captive market for their machine made goods. This was made possible due to India's backwardness, superstitions, multiplicity of sects, gurus and sub-faiths, each running down the other. Finally there was the predominance of the Brahmin priests who made other movements like **Bhakti** initially difficult to follow by their reprobation. This plethora of problems started Dayanand straight in the face, and he felt that he must do something about it.

For a proper understanding of the emergence of Arya Samaj we have to transport ourselves mentally to the period when colonisation was at its zenith.

India was governed by foreigners for more than ten centuries. Such a prolonged spell of domination demanded the spirit of India and weakened her. This whole period was of decadence and anaemic activity with an exception of bright patches such as the rise of Marathas, Peshwas and Rajputs, in the south, and the rise of Chalukyas, Cholas and Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in the Punjab. Foreign rule led to a great degree of dependence among Indians. The Brahmin priests were the final authority for all matters, including rituals and customs. The householder could not do anything without consulting them. The Brahmin was often very educated, but he carried his "**patra**" or "**panchang**", and nobody could question either his book or

his authority. The Brahmin priest pontificated in all ceremonies from birth to death. He had to be well fed, paid handsomely and kept in good humour. Ignorance, superstition and blind faith in all rituals of the past held supreme sway. However it must be pointed out that not all Indians were under the blind rule of Brahmins and also that movements such as **Bhakti**, **Sufism** and **Veerashaivism** had grown and flourished during the period.

Untouchability held away among the Hindus who did not touch millions of their own brothers — the Shudras for fear of pollution. If they did, they had to take a cleansing bath. There was a question of interdinning with them. The Hindu world was divided into a large number of sects and subsects, each with their own Guru and their main scripture. Questioning and enquiry was not their method; whatever was written in their sacred books and interpreted by their Guru became their creed. The scriptures were graded as sacrosanct, however any clever pandit could add his own invention to promote his own group-vested interests or special privileges in the name of the “Rishi” who was the original author. Such interpolations, though few in number, distorted the meanings of the original text and created total confusion in the interpretation of such texts. Swami Dayanand sought to unite all Hindus under the banner of the Vedas. He felt that so far as the Vedas were concerned interpolations were impossible.

#### Box 26.02

Dayanand preached his own vision of Hinduism. He entered into many debates with learned Pandits. He travelled far and wide in Northern India. In 1872 a meeting with Brahma Samaj leaders made him change his mode of address from Sanskrit to Hindi and was thus able to get a better response from the middle classes of the Hindu community. He founded schools and periodicals with the help of the Hindi speaking middle classes. Numerous books and pamphlets were also published. In 1875 the Arya Samaj was founded in Bombay (See 26.3 of this unit). This continued to exist but it was North India that really welcomed Dayanand's message.

### 26.3 FOUNDATION OF ARYA SAMAJ

Swami Dayanand took an important and far reaching decision during his tour to Bombay in 1875. This decision was regarding the foundation of “Arya Samaj”. This organisation was founded to plant his message and bring reform firmly to the soil of north India. It went on to have an enormous impact on the development of Hinduism and of Indian nationalism.

The idea of an organisation had been in Dayanand's mind for some time. He had tried several times earlier to form a society. Once in Arrah in 1872 and again at Banaras in 1874, but both attempts had been short lived. On January 16, 1875 he set up the Arya Samaj at Rajkot but it did not flourish. Again in January 1875 he set up another Arya Samaj at Ahmedabad, but this attempt too failed. But on April 10, 1875 he set up the Arya Samaj at Bombay. It proved very successful. In Bombay a combination of factors created the right atmosphere for his renewed attempts to spread the influence of Arya Samaj. It may also be considered that by now Dayanand had a better preparation for setting up an organisation than earlier times. His ideas on reform had by now fully matured. There was his book the *Satyarth Prakash* in which he starts with his philosophy of education. He stresses that it is parental duty to make their children educated and of high moral character. He proposed that from the age of five children should learn Sanskrit and Hindi and foreign languages as well. His was thus a three language formula. He was also for parents disciplining their children and socializing them properly. Dayanand was for rigorous education from the age 8 years for both girls and boys, but was not for

co-educational institutions. All students are required to observe Bhramacharya. Dayanand was however for equality of men and women through education. He vehemently opposed child marriage and said that marriage should not be before the age 16 for girls and before the age 25 for boys.

One of the most important and unconventional steps that Dayanand took was to offer to "reclaim" Hindus who had changed their religion to Islam, Christianity and so on. This was often done *en masse* in what was known as the "Suddhi" ceremony or ceremony of purification.

The establishment of Arya Samaj raises a number of important questions. How did Dayanand conceive the role of the Samaj in society, and how did he see his own function in the Samaj? Who were the people interested in joining this organisation, and what were the reasons behind it? What kind of institution emerged (Arya Samaj) and what were its models? We will turn to these questions now.

It may be considered that Dayanand wanted to bring together all Hindus who agreed on a couple of very broad issues: (i) a dedication to religious and social reforms and (ii) a conviction in Hinduism that reform was to come through a revival of Vedic religion. Being organised as a body, these people would be more effective in helping one another in influencing the whole society. Swami Dayanand was not interested in creating a body of followers to propagate his ideas. He held the opinion that reform had to come from the people themselves. It is the task of the people to work for their personal improvement and for the upliftment of society. Dayanand would always be available to the people for advice—either in person or through his publications, but he would not be their leader. He had recognised the limitations of his own knowledge and refused to become the Guru of a group of devotees not even of a single individual.

On the basis of several statements of his we can conclude that from the very beginning Dayanand conceived his own role in the Samaj as anything but a dominant one. It was not his idea that the Samaj should become the esoteric heaven of a selected few, but rather that it should be a broad based and open association that could unite all Hindus of goodwill, around the unifying centre of their religion namely the Vedas. These fundamental attitudes of Dayanand towards the Samaj gradually became stronger as the organisation itself grew in later years.

The meeting and discussions that led to the establishment of the Samaj did not take much of Dayanand's time, which was mostly devoted to his usual work that is preaching, teaching, writing books and establishing Arya Samajis all over India. The public lecture had become the main instruments of his teaching. He had mainly concentrated on the positive side of his message—the history of Aryan people, Vedic revelation, the doctrines of God and soul, ethics and the upliftment of the nation. He had always been reluctant to let the flow of his lectures be interrupted or to have long question and answer sessions after the lectures.

### 26.3.1 Organisation of Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj had an effective organisational structure. Every branch of the Arya Samaj is a unit in itself, and these are located in villages, towns and cities.

- i) Membership involved acceptance of the ten principles or rules (See Section 26.3.2 for a description of these), the payment of one per cent of monthly or yearly income to help the cause and general cooperation and participation in meetings etc. Such weekly meetings comprised of the *homa* ritual, bhajans and prayers. A lay person regardless of caste conducts these meetings.
- ii) The Executive Committee governed the affairs of the Arya Samaj. The office

bearers were five in number and additional members all elected by the members themselves. The officers are (a) President, (b) Vice-President, (c) Secretary, (d) Accountant, (e) Librarian. These members are supposed to actively participate in the activities of the Samaj.

These members as said are elected annually by ballot, and re-election is permissible.

- iii) Next there is the Provincial Assembly where representatives of the Samaj play an important part. Each Arya Samaj is to give 10 per cent of its gross income to the assembly. The assembly could raise funds of its own.
- iv) The apex body however is the All-India assembly. This is formed by representations from all provinces and links them together.
- v) There are young men's Arya Samajis which are liberal in admitting members who believe in god and pay a nominal monthly subscription for membership.
- vi) It may be pointed out that the Samaj has its meeting places anywhere it can organise them, whether they are their own building or any other place which will suffice and is available.

### 26.3.2 Rules of the Arya Samaj

The Bombay Arya Samaj started with 28 rules which touch religious, social, educational and organisational matters. Some of these rules are as follows: The Arya Samaj is necessary for the good of all the people. Each province shall have a principal Samaj with branches at as many places as possible. Once a week there shall be a meeting of the Samaj where Sam Veda Mantra shall be sung. There may be lectures and songs in praise of god with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The Samaj shall maintain a library of Sanskrit and Hindi books; shall maintain accounts (member to pay 1% of their earnings), publish a paper, run Arya schools separately for boys and girls (at the girl's school only women staff shall be appointed). Learned men would be sent about to preach truth at other places. Members should love other members as they love themselves. All ceremonies (including marriages and funerals) shall be performed according to the Vedas. Any dishonest and wicked member could be expelled, but not through prejudice or partisanship. Apart from the President and the Secretary, there would be an executive. There would be recognition and reward for outstanding work. The Samaj would work for the reformation of the country—both spiritual and material. For a job in Arya Samaj institutions, an Arya



Dayanand

Samajist would be given preference. When a donation is to be made at the time of marriage, it should go to the Arya Samaj. The prime religious rule was that Vedas are supreme and have self evident authority; other books from the teachings of the Rishis have secondary authority. Formless God is to be worshipped.

The 28 rules are exhaustive and detailed; also these were numerous and could not be remembered. Hence their number was cut down to ten at Lahore. June 24, 1877 was an important day in the history of Arya Samaj since it was on this day that the foundation of Arya Samaj was laid down in Lahore.

This was not an affiliate of the Bombay Arya Samaj. The Lahore Samaj was a new chapter in its history — it meant almost a transformation of the old Samaj. For instance the 28 (**niyamas**) rules accepted at Bombay were carefully revised, reworded and educated to a manageable “Ten Principles”. It was as if the Arya Samaj had got a New Constitution. The number of founding members of Lahore Arya Samaj was about a hundred. This number went up to about 500 by the end of July.

The ten rules were adopted on July 24, 1877. These are the fundamental tenets of Arya Samaj and all Aryas are expected to conform to them. The first two are related to God and the third to the Vedas. God and the Vedas are the bases of Arya Samaj. The rest are a guide to the conduct of a moral man. These ten rules are as under:

- i) **God is the primordial root (source) of all true knowledge** and of all things that can be known through knowledge.
- ii) **God is all Truth, All knowledge, All Bliss.** He is Bodyless (Formless), Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unborn, Infinite, Unchangeable, Beginningless, Incomparable, Support and Lord of all, All pervading, knower and controller of all form within, Imperishable, Immortal, Fearless, Eternal, Holy and the creator of the whole universe. He alone is worthy of worship.
- iii) **Vedas are the books of all true knowledge.** It is the prime duty of all Aryas to study and propagate the Veda, to hear and preach it.

After God, the Veda is the most important constituent of Dayanand's ideology. His call “Back to the Vedas” means that we are to reject all changes that may be found in the scriptures, that may be at variance with the teachings of the Vedas. The Veda is God's own word, revealed to mankind through the Rishis (sages). They are thus of non-human authorship.

- iv) We should always be ready to **accept Truth and reject untruth.**

This is an important dictum. We should not stick to any opinion, merely because it has the sanction of time. If it is untrue, we should have no hesitation in abandoning it.

- v) **All actions should be performed according to Dharma** and after considering the right and wrong of each. Do the right, shun the wrong that is the formula.
- vi) The principal of this Samaj is **to do good to the world** — physical, social and spiritual.

This means that Arya Samaj is no sectarian or parochial institution working for the good of only its own members, as some of closed societies claim to be. The Samaj is created for the good of the whole world. This is a far cry from the old Hindu approach of extreme individualism, where each aspirant sought only his own “**Mukti**” or salvation. In fact it was the early goal of young Dayanand

too, before Swamy Virjananda widened his horizon and commanded him to work for the good of the country and the whole world.

vii) **We should deal with people with love, righteousness and consideration of their merit.**

The basis of our behaviour with all fellow beings should be of love, and goodwill, not snobbery, hate, ill will or jealousy. A society based on universal love will bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. Also a person of superior merit would receive superior regards.

This is the character of human dignity, but it does not preach blind equality, irrespective of a persons virtues or vice, genius or mediocrity, worth or otherwise. This is Vedic socialism.

viii) **We should work for the liquidation of ignorance and promotion of knowledge.**

Illiteracy, ignorance and superstitions are the mother of all ills and evils, while knowledge brings joy and all round welfare. The preachings at myriad Arya Samaj platforms and the network of D.A.V. and Gurukul institutions are translating this rule into practice.

ix) **No one should be content with his own upliftment but should feel his own good in the good of all.**

This means that all human beings, being the image of God are one entity. The whole emphasis is from selfish to altruistic good. No man or group can be happy if all round people are starving or miserable, as they would only bring down the whole social structure. To do good to others is no favour but enlightened self interest.

x) **All men are obliged (unfree) in having to obey the social laws that have been framed for the good of all; but everyone is free to work for his own welfare.**

For instance, one is not free to break the traffic laws or commit theft or murder, for all such laws are there, for the good of all. **But in all personal matters, concerning one's individual good, one has freedom. That means one has freedom of action but not at the cost of the well being of others.**

**Check Your Progress 1**

i) **What kind of role did Dayanand conceive for himself in the Arya Samaj ? Answer in about two to three sentences.**

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ii) **How many rules did the Lahore Arya Samaj conceive for its members ? Enumerate any five of them.**

a) .....  
b) .....  
c) .....  
d) .....  
e) .....

To conclude we can say these ten rules are the principles for a noble and happy society as conceived of by Swami Dayanand. These rules would apply to people in all countries and all ages. Except for rule 3 which gives primacy to Vedas.

#### Activity 1

Make a list of the ten principles of the Arya Samaj in Lahore (1877). Ask any Arya Samajis you know what they can summarize about them. Write down their comments in your notebook and discuss with other students in the study centre, if possible.

### 26.3.3 Members of the Arya Samaj

Accordingly a committee of 22 was elected and the list is very impressive one. Half of the members have a university degree : five M.As; three doctors, one lawyer and two B.As. By 1877 not more than a dozen Punjabis could have gained that degree. It means that nearly half of that number were on the Samaj Committee. If half of the committee could boast of a university degree, the presumption is that many other Aryas had matriculation and higher degrees. **Thus we can conclude that Lahore Arya Samaj Committee was indeed representative of the cream of educated Punjabis.**

Of the twenty-two committee members, only one was a Brahmin, whereas probably over eighty per cent were Khattris. That was in sharp contrast to **the educational qualification** of Bombay Arya Samaj membership. Swami Dayanand was lucky in bringing in such intellectual stalwarts as had the capacity to greatly elevate the Samaj and its programmes to a very high standard. Lahore proved to be a take off stage for the Samaj in every way.

#### Box 26.03

The social ideals of the Arya Samaj were meant to reflect the ideals of the Vedas and these were:

- i) Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man
- ii) The equality of the sexes
- iii) Justice and fairplay between peoples and between nations
- iv) Equal opportunity to all according to their merit
- v) Love and charity towards all.

### 26.3.4 Publication of Vedabhashya

Swami Dayanand always swore by the Vedas, but whenever some one quoted any mantra from the Vedas giving traditional meaning to it, Dayanand always put his own interpretation on it. On persuasion of some of his friends Dayanand started working on his “Vedabhashya” (commentary on Vedas) with enthusiasm. He said that most of the Vedic mantras had a triple meaning:

- i) one relating to sacrifices and rituals (traditional interpretation of Sayana etc.);
- ii) spiritual and philosophical meaning (Dayanand’s contribution); and
- iii) scientific meaning (again his innovation).

Swami Dayanand devoted some of the last years of his life to the activities that



involved him and his Samaj with the wider world of Hinduism. His public notice at Hardwar has clearly stated the policy; consensus not controversy was to be the guiding motto. The Arya Samaj which was already showing some leanings towards sectarianism, had to become the rallying point of all Hindus of goodwill and had to be accepted by Hindus as such. The collaboration with the theosophists was promoted by these intentions and so was the composition of the board of trustees of the “Paropkarini” sabha. But the most significant move in that direction was the involvement of the Aryas in the following three successive agitations i.e. for

- i) Indramani case (for violating Samaj’s conduct);
- ii) Cow protection; and
- iii) popularization of Hindi.

Each of these causes brought many Hindus together across the barriers of caste, sect and provincialism. By its enthusiastic participation the Arya Samaj could project the image of being the protagonist of broad Hindu nationalism. In fact these movements or agitations were not originally launched by Dayanand, but he came to the assistance of these movements that were well launched and to which a large number of Hindus were deeply committed. Thus Dayanand steered his Samaj towards closer cooperation with orthodox and sectarian Hindus, and anticipated the movement of “Sangathan” consolidation and integration of the whole Hindu community.

### Activity 2

Visit an Arya Samaj Centre in your town and ask the members to explain you the contemporary role of Arya Samaj.

Another important indication of the widening of Dayanand’s outlook is that in the last year of his life, for the first time he paid attention to South India. To him “Aryavarta” has always meant the region—north of the Vindhya range. But with the passage of time his concern broadened and acquired national and political dimensions and he turned towards the south of India. But this all-India dream was shattered by Dayanand’s untimely death.

## 26.4 ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT AND REFORM

The Arya Samaj opened a vast number of educational institutions for boys and girls all over north India. Orphanages were opened and thus Christian missionaries were prevented from converting people to Christianity. Arya Samaj’s worked on earthquake relief. In 1923 when the Moplas of Malabar forcibly converted Hindus to Islam it was the Arya Samaj’s who reconverted them to Hinduism. Before Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of untouchables it was the Arya Samaj’s who had tried to get them recognised as equal members of Hindu Society. They also carried on a ceaseless effort to remove their superstitions and teach them the fundamental doctrines of religion.

Dayanand formed many Gurukuls as part of the Arya Samaj educational programme. The first D.A.V. (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic) College was founded in Lahore to commensurate Dayanand’s memory after his death in Ajmer in 1883. This institution became a focal point of national education in the country. The idea of the Founders of Lahore College was to induce the scientific temperament in the students without uprooting them from their spiritual, cultural, religious moorings. Till then only the British Government or foreign Christian missionaries had established such English medium colleges. However, some followers of Dayanand e.g. Swami Shardhanand did not agree with the medium of instruction and set up a parallel institution called

Gurukul in Kangri, near Hardwar in U.P. which also flourished. It was based on the ancient ideal of a residential school where teachers and students lived as a family. Today Gurukuls in India number over 50, most of them in Haryana. There was a dispute between both parties (DAV and Gurukul) as each claimed to be the genuine followers of Dayanand. The educational centres were completely free of Government control and considered to be anti-British. Again it was the politically moderate wing of the Arya Samaj represented by the D.A.V. College movement which made a greater impact on the educated middle class. This middle class was at the vanguard of the Indian Renaissance in the 19th century. **The Arya Samaj's educational policy was thus totally at variance with that of Lord William Bentinck (policy of 1834) and that of the Christian missionaries which was to make either clerks for administration or converts into Christianity.**

#### 26.4.1 Three Challenges to Hinduism

The Hindu religion grew and flourished and had the capacity to absorb any new religious force and its perpetuity was taken for granted. But thrice in recorded history, it had faced decisive challenges — once from Buddhism and Jainism, later from Islam and lastly from Christianity.

Arya Samaj has performed an important social mission during the third and latest crisis in Hinduism which came with the British rule. Arya Samaj successfully stopped the tide of mass conversions to Christianity. In defending Hinduism Arya Samaj had played a significant role.

#### 26.4.2 Arya Samaj and Emancipation of Women

Women, like Harijans have been called 'Slaves of the slaves'. In the British era men were the slaves of the British and women were the slaves of these enslaved men. Women had few rights, little freedom and were rarely considered as equals to men.

Dayanand, the founder of Arya Samaj was among the pioneers of women's rights and equality in modern times. He advocated the equality of sexes. **Dayanand encouraged women to study the Vedas — a revolutionary step at that time.** They were allowed to recite "Gayatree" mantra while tradition did not permit them this privilege. Dayanand forcefully put forward the argument that women "rishis" account for 200 mantras in the Rig-Veda alone.

He also carried on a crusade against child marriage. Dayanand ordained that no girl should be married till she was 16 and boys should marry at 25 or above. Thus he confronted the so called 'Shastric' injunction that, if a girl had her menses in her father's house, the father and brother would go to hell. This idea was ridiculed by Dayanand. His argument was why should anyone go to hell because of a natural function.

Dayanand's stand was that men or women should marry only once. For a young widow, his prescription was for 'Niyoga', rather than widow marriage. To him "Niyoga" meant temporary union with the dead husband's brother or other kin to get a child or two but not more than two. But his concept of Niyoga was not accepted by the Aryas; Dayanand in a true democratic spirit did not press his point. In fact, Arya Samaj in the Punjab advertised for and arranged some widow remarriages and Dayanand acquiesced.

Arya Samaj took up the cause of and improved education in general and women's education in an impressive way. As mentioned earlier it has organised a network of schools and colleges in the country both for boys and girls where education was imparted in the mother-tongue. Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (D.A.V.) colleges were

founded. Some of the Conservative Arya Samajis were of the opinion that education imported in these colleges were not sufficiently Vedic in character, therefore in the leadership of Munshi Ram they started Gurukul at Hardwar, where education in its method and content was given in the ancient Vedic manner. Being the pioneer in opening women's schools, colleges and Gurukuls, Arya Samaj founded the first Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Jallunder in 1896.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note on the educational qualifications of the members of the Lahore Arya Samaj. Use about 3-5 lines for your answer.

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- 2) Elaborate the role of Arya Samaj for the emancipation of women. Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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### 26.4.3 Politics and the Arya Samaj

Dayanand was not just a social and religious reformer. He was also a forerunner in the national and political awakening of India. The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 a decade before the Indian National Congress. Dayanand had prepared the ground and declared that foreign government is no substitute for self-rule. **Lala Lajpat Rai has mentioned that the British had always viewed the Arya Samaj with suspicion. This often took the form of deportations prosecutions etc. of its members.** The Arya Samaj was considered a seditious body. Members were dismissed from civil and military service solely on the grounds that they were members of the Arya Samaj. The open declaration of the desire for political freedom at a time when jailing was common for such utterances showed a great deal of moral courage from its members. The Arya Samaj however always mentioned it was a religious, social and cultural organisation.

In bringing about the transition of the loyalist character of the Indian National Congress to a mass political movement (moderate to radical approach) by Mahatma Gandhi, Arya Samaj Movement played a significant role as admitted by Dr. Rajendra Prasad the first President of India. The Congress also took over most of the social reforms as advocated by the Arya Samaj as part of the National Movement.

The Arya Samaj stand on political freedom and socio-cultural changes was indicated when the Congress adopted the removal of untouchability, the emancipation of women, and other reforms. A large number of the members of Arya Samaj became

active supporters of Mahatma Gandhi. However the Arya Samaj remains away from power politics and is a social reform movement. It is a non-political organisation.

According to D. Vable, the post independence scenario saw the inroads of power politics into the Arya Samaj. While in 1915 it was on the rise subsequently from 1920 onwards, as the Congress became popular under Gandhi, and it began to decline. The political resurgence of the pre-independence days much reduced its influence. Further the influence of Hinduism also threatened its very identity. At present 65 years or so after the warning given by Lala Lajpat Rai the Arya Samaj faces its own erasure by Hinduism, which it once purported to defend. The Arya Samaj in fact would do well to think of its own identity, rather than defend the Hindus.

Swami Dayanand and Arya Samaj movement have contributed in the National movement in the following ways:

- 1) support of the Hindi language
- 2) Swadeshi and Khadi were supported
- 3) opposition to salt taxes, was agreed upon and supported.

Some critics have dubbed Swami Dayanand as a reactionary, looking back towards the dead past because he gave the call "Back to Vedas". Yet Dayanand ushered in modern action in India just as Gandhiji did half a century later.

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## 26.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we described the Arya Samaj as a social movement. We began with the need for reform in the 19th Century and went on to the founding of the Arya Samaj, its organisation, principles/rules, early members and the publication of *Vedabyasa*. In the next section we discussed the Arya Samaj movement and reform. This includes the Samaj's response to the challenges to Hinduism, emancipation of women and its role in politics. We have therefore provided a clear picture of Arya Samaj as a modern religious movement.

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## 26.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Arya Samaj</b>	: literally the "Society of Aryans" it came to existence in 1875 under the aegis of Swami Dayanand.
<b>Gurukul</b>	: a teaching institution based on the ideals of Arya Samaj.
<b>Interpolations</b>	: interpretations and extensions of a holy text (in this case, the Vedas).
<b>Mantras</b>	: sacred words, chants, spells.
<b>Monotheistic</b>	: a belief in one God only.
<b>Nyamas</b>	: rules and regulations.
<b>Niyoga</b>	: where a widow is allowed to get children by her brother-in-law.
<b>Mukti</b>	: spiritual liberation.

<b>Orthodox</b>	: traditional views often without substance.
<b>Panchang</b>	: Hindu calendar of auspicious and inauspicious dates.
<b>Parochial</b>	: narrow and partisan views.
<b>Suddhi</b>	: Rites of reconversion of Hindus back from the religion of their conversion.

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## 26.7 FURTHER READINGS

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## 26.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Dayanand conceived of himself as a guiding light of the Arya Samaj. He did not think of himself as a leader or a guru to be followed.
- 2) The Lahore Arya Samaj simplified the original 28 rules to simply ten. Five of these rules for members were:
  - i) God is the source of all true knowledge.
  - ii) God is Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss.
  - iii) Vedas are the books of all true knowledge.
  - iv) Accept Truth, reject untruth.
  - v) Each man should follow his **Dharma**.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The members of the original Lahore Arya Samaj were highly educated and had among them lawyers, doctors, B.As and M.As. Thus the members of the Samaj were highly educated.
- 2) Women in Colonial India were 'Slaves of slaves'. Dayanand fought against this slavery. He fought against child marriage and reintroduced Niyoga, and countered many deep entrenched superstitions. He arranged widow remarriages. For women's education Dayanand's followers started womens educational institutions called "Gurukuls".