



Voicing the Unvoiced (Arya Darpan's Contribution towards Feminist Historiography)

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ABSTRACT: One of the most important and extensive social reform movements was initiated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), who was one of the few great men of the world, who sacrificed everything for emancipation of mankind. He was a great scholar, a yogi, a social reformer, a philosopher and a political thinker. Swami Dayanand was one of the most powerful figures of modern India, who spread the Vedic religion and through the Arya Samaj, played an important part in the Indian renaissance. "He had taken a long and deep draught," observed The Hindu Patriot of 17th of January 1870, "at the perennial spring-head which had quenched his thirst and filled his soul with indescribable peace.

KEYWORDS: Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Philosopher, Political, Vedic, Peace

I. INTRODUCTION

He had wandered long and far in the gloom before he received the light- the light of true and pure Dharma, the religion of the Vedas. With insight born of this light, he saw clearly through the vast and enveloping mist of error, delusion and superstition which was bedimmed the vision of the inhabitants of India and of other parts of the globe. He did not hug this new-found treasure to his bosom like a miser lest others might come to know of it and snatch it away from him; but, like a generous prince he made a free gift of it to his people".

During his travels to various parts of India, he found the condition of his country and that of the Hindu society deplorable and depressing. Many superstitions, dogmas and undesirable rituals were propounded in the name of religion. They included extreme feeling of casteism, untouchability,[1,2,3] child and unequal or unmatched marriage, prohibition on education and re-marriage of women (even if widowed in infancy or childhood), sati (self immolation by a wife upon the death of her husband) etc. Dayanand resolved to awaken India and the Hindu society. In his famous book, Satyarth Prakash (The Light of Truth), he sought to dispel rituals, dogmas and superstitions among all Indians. Dayanand was a staunch supporter of the belief that education was indispensable for the betterment of the mental, social and psychological development of all individuals irrespective of their caste, creed or sex. Knowledge was a panacea for him, which, he believed, could efface many social and individual problems and which could change the face of society. He recommended various multifarious activities for the betterment of women in Indian society. He not only emphasized upon the abolition of abhorrent practices and customs pertaining to them, but also, advocated women's upliftment through provision of education to them and by motivating them to come out of their purdah or veil and fight for their own cause. He revolted against the abuses from which they suffered, recalling that in the heroic age they occupied in the home and in society a position at least equal to men. They ought to have equal education, according to him, and supreme control in marriage, over household matters including the finances.

He was an equalitarian and a rational thinker in his approach and was deadly against certain social vices prevalent in Indian society at that time. He advocated education for everybody, favoured widow remarriages and was deadly against infant, child and unequal marriage, polygamy, marriage of [4,5,6] the old people, and vehemently opposed the practice of the performance of useless ceremonies and incurring heavy expenditure at the time of marriages and deaths, etc. To oppose these prevalent mal practices and to teach people the meaning of the Vedas and other religious Shastras, he established the Arya Samaj in 1875. After the death of Dayanand, the Arya Samaj carried on the works of their Master and tried to do away with these social vices and enlightened the Indian society. The works of the Arya Samaj and its vehement arguments for the emancipation of women, the struggle and the sufferings of its leaders and volunteers, the personal examples (in the promotion of social reforms) created by the Samajists, all these created a dent in the minds of the people. The Arya Samaj showed them the path and provided them the light of reason and logic and thereby motivated them to take the Herculean task of cleaning their own stables.

It is remarkable that in the Indian society of late 19th century, various social reformers and reform associations, including the Arya Samaj, were working to put an end to the sorrows of the women and highlighted the deplorable condition of the women in the Indian society and became successful in the eradication of some of them. But it is also



worthy to be mentioned here that the impact of Arya Samaj was much more felt in western and northern India than any other such reform association. The impact of most of the reform associations was confined to a particular region like Bengal or Maharashtra, while the works of the Arya Samaj influenced a major part of western and northern India (including those portions that are now a part of Pakistan).

It is worth mentioning that the Arya Samaj advocated widow remarriages and despite of the prejudices against it in the society, the Samaj relentlessly worked for it. It forced people to think over the pitiable condition of the widows and motivated them to work for their cause. It successfully organized many widow [7,8,9] remarriages and because of the arguments forwarded for their remarriage, many enlightened persons came forward to support this movement.

II. DISCUSSION

It is important to note that to create awareness in favour of social reforms amongst the public and to spread its ideology the Arya Samaj started many newspapers and magazines. As stated earlier, the Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 and within three years of its founding, a Hindi monthly, was published in 1878, from Shahjahanpur in the United Provinces. It was named as Arya Darpan and carried the news and views of the Arya world.¹ In 1878 another monthly paper, Bharat Sudasha Pravartak was published from Farrukhabad and promoted the Hindi language enthusiastically. Pt. Munna Lal (a member of Arya Samaj, Ajmer) started publishing Desh Hitaishi in 1882 and was also the editor of it.² And the next year Arya Samaj, Kanpur launched Ved Prakash. Similarly, Arya Samaj, Prayag started a magazine Bharat Bhagini in 1888 exclusively for women and it gained recognition from readers of the fair sex. The Paropkarini Sabha launched the first edition of the Paropkari in 1889 with the aim of encouraging reforms in the Hindu samaj. It was remarkable that Hindi was the language of every Arya weekly or monthly despite Urdu holding sway as a language of transaction of official work in government offices. In the year 1898, the Arya Samaj [10,11,12] published 'Muharrir' newspaper in Urdu, under the editorship of Munshi Narayan Prasad, the name of which was later on changed to Arya Mitra in 1899 and it began to be published in Hindi.³ Pt. Bhimsen started 'Arya Siddhant',⁴ while the Peshawar Arya Samaj started 'Dharmopadesh' newspaper.⁵ Swami Darshanand Saraswati (earlier known as Pt. Kriparam) started 'Timir Nashak' (in 1889), Ved Pracharak (in 1894) and Vedic Dharma (in 1897).⁶ Likewise, Swami Nityanand (a resident of Jodhpur) wrote 'Purusharth Prakash'.⁷ Pt. Gopinath published 'Akhbare Aam,' and 'Sanatan Dharma Gazette'.⁸ Lala Munshiram (later on Swami Shradhdhanand) published Saddharma Pracharak.⁹ Originally it was in Urdu but later on in 1906 it began to be published in Hindi.¹⁰ Aryavart was started by Dr. Kartik Prasad Dev,¹¹ while Pt. Guru Datta published monthly 'Vedic Magazine' in English.¹² Mahashaya Krishna started weekly 'Prakash' in Urdu and 'Pratap' in Urdu. Seth Mangilal 'Kavi Kinkar' edited 'Anath Rakshak', which was published from Ajmer.¹³

Besides Saddharma Pracharak, Shradhdha, Satyavadi, the Gurukul Magazine, Vedic Magazine and Gurukul Samachar were also published from time to time. Vaidik Sandesh, Alankarand Gurukul Samachar, Gurukul (weekly), Gurukul monthly, Gurukul Patrika, The Vedic Path, Prahlad, Shatpath, Arya Bhatt (Hindi) and Arya Bhatt (English) for Science faculty and students.¹⁴ It will be interesting here to note the contribution of some of these newspapers and magazines, as far as the issues concerned with women are concerned.

As discussed earlier, to sensitize the people regarding women's questions, the Arya Darpan was started by the Samaj in 1878. In its issue of April, 1880,¹⁵ it published an appeal from Pandit Natthuram, a resident of district Hazara, who [13,14,15] was a widower and who was being compelled to marry for the second time by his own relatives. In this appeal, he requested the members of the Samaj to search a widow for him, who was willing to remarry. He made a fervent appeal to help him in this "holy and noble work" and asked them to make efforts for more such marriages. Similarly, in its issue of June 1880, The Arya Darpan,¹⁶ laid emphasis on women's education and in its support, quoted the 2nd verse from chapter XXVI from Yajurveda, which said that it was the right of everyone, including women and Shudras, to study the holy Vedas.

The Arya Darpan of December 1880,¹⁷ in its article 'Striyon ka Adhikaar aur Usme Anyaay' (The rights of Women and the Injustice to them) laid emphasis on the equality of sexes and dealt in detail about the injustice meted out to them at every walk of their life. "Since there is no doubt", remarks the writer of this article,^{17(a)} "that the women, too, are human beings... therefore whatever rights that are enjoyed by men, the same rights should be given to women also." "Men has deliberately", the writer further observes, "not considered the other half of the population as human beings." (translation mine) The writer deplores that as daughters, as sisters, as wives and as mothers they have to face a different treatment all through their lives as compared to their sons, brothers and husbands. The article requested its readers to consider them as human beings and give women equal opportunities, equal rights, and all that which is due to them. [16,17,18]

This is important as well as interesting to note here, that this article appeared in the Arya Darpan in December 1880, 69 years before the publication of *Le deuxième sexe* (translated in English as *The Second Sex* and published in June



1949), by Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), the celebrated French writer, feminist and social theorist.¹⁸ In the chapter "Woman: Myth and Reality" of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir similarly argued that men had made women the "Other" in society by application of a false aura of "mystery" around them. She argued that men used this as an excuse not to understand women or their problems and not to help them, and that this stereotyping was always done in societies by the group higher in the hierarchy to the group lower in the hierarchy. She wrote that a similar kind of oppression by hierarchy also happened in other categories of identity, such as race, class and religion, but she claimed that it was nowhere more true than with gender in which men stereotyped women and used it as an excuse to organize society into a patriarchy. According to her, women who do not follow the domestic norm are looked down upon in society. In its issue of December 1880,¹⁹ the *Arya Darpan* in its article entitled 'Zara Idhar bhi Dekho' (i.e. Please look here too) raised the problem of abandoned infants. The article cited a few cases, which happened in that year, of abandonment of new born babies, where young widows^[19,20,21] were forced to abandon them because of the feeling of shame and guilt. Born by widows, the society considered these infants as a product of licentious relationship. Some of these young widows, the article claimed, wished to remarry but the society at that time was not in favour of widow remarriages and considered it as unethical practice or a sin. The article touched the human aspects of this problem and brought in light the physical, psychological, material and social needs of the widows and especially the young childless widows and asked the readers to consider the problem with a human heart. Similarly the article 'Ek Vidhwa ka Vivah' (marriage of a widow), printed in the December, 1880 issue of *Arya Darpan*²⁰, severely condemned the efforts of those people who opposed such marriages. It linked this problem with that of infanticide and requested the society to ponder over this grave problem with sensitivity.

III. RESULTS

In its February, 1881 issue,²¹ the *Arya Darpan* again raised the issue of widow remarriage and the problems associated with it. Dwarka Prasad Kayastha, son of Munshi Balgovind Kayastha, one of the members of *Arya Samaj* and a resident of Farrukhabad, suggested the formation of an organization, which would assist in widow remarriages. According to the plan proposed by him, those widows and widowers, who were desirous of a second marriage, were to send their biodata and horoscopes to this organization, which would then match them and after matching their suitability regarding age, health etc., would inform the concerned parties and would make necessary arrangements for their marriage. He also suggested that the horoscopes and the description of such parties, should be published in the newspapers in form of matrimonial advertisements.^[22,23,24]

In its March issue of 1881,²² the *Arya Darpan*, published an appeal from an anonymous young widow, who wished to remarry but who was afraid to do so because of the fear of the society. In her letter cum appeal, she expressed her disappointment for not allowing the widows to remarry and cursed and blamed the Pundits (whom she called "tho the Pundit Bail" i.e. scholars like useless oxen and "nagare jaisi tond wale" i.e. belly pot) for inserting such injunctions in the religious scriptures which discouraged widow remarriages. She also charged them as hypocrites as they refuted widow remarriages but tried to seduce such helpless creatures for their petty interests. Similarly, an article entitled "Striyon ki dasha par bhi kuch dhyaan do" (Pay some attention to the condition of women) written by a woman (by the pseudo name of one Bharat khandi Stri i.e. one woman of India) in the same issue²³ dealt with the necessity of education amongst women and highlighted the condition in which they were living and suffering in absence of education. Until and unless efforts are made to educate the women of India, India cannot reach the pinnacle of glory, claimed the writer.

Similarly, the *Arya Darpan*, in its issue of April 1881²⁴, published a poem entitled 'Hindu Hua To Kya Hua' in which the practice of child, unequal marriage, marriage of the old people, extravagancy in marriages etc. were criticized and an appeal was made to its readers to think over the sad plight of child widows (please see appendix). It asked them to sincerely work for the cause of widow remarriages and told them in unflinching words that this problem will not come to an end by merely lecturing on this subject. According to the newspaper, it will need concrete efforts to do away with these problems. It will be interesting to note some of the couplets of a poem, which highlighted the burning issues related with women:

In its issue of June, 1881,²⁵ the *Arya Darpan* again raised the issue of the sad plight of widows in the then society. The society at that time was not in favour of widow remarriages (even of child widows) and had certain prejudices against it, while it allowed polygamy and the remarriages of widowers of any age. *Arya Darpan* published the letter of a widow, who presented her feelings and told that they (i.e. widows) were being harassed by the inhuman customs and prejudices of the society towards them. She told that it was difficult for some of them, on account of their young ages, to control their physical needs and they long for the company of men. They too wish to be remarried. But these things they could not share with anybody, for they were afraid that people would not listen to them sympathetically and would call them names



Again, in its issue of September 1881²⁶, the Arya Darpan published a poem entitled the 'Vidhwa Pukar' (i.e. the cry of the widow), in which the sorrows of widows were discussed. The writer, most probably a widow, expresses her dissatisfaction and utter feeling of helplessness against the age-old traditions of the society. She curses the social customs, which were not in favour of their remarriages. Instead of doing away with their sorrows, the society asked them to be loyal to their dead partners, to control their passion and observe fasts and accept their fate without any grievance.

It is interesting to note that in its issue of October, 1881²⁷ the Arya Darpan published two gazals, presented below, which depicts the sorrows of the women in general and widows in particular.

It is important to note that in another song published in the Arya Darpan of April, 1881, p.94, presented below, the same feelings have been reflected. One of the enlightened ladies of the then society who perhaps belonged to the Arya Samaj, contributed this song by the name of 'Striyon ki Dasha par rone wali Bharatkhandi Stri' (i.e. Woman of India, who weeps for the condition of women)

(i.e. Oh! Aryans. You have not faced the sorrows like us. You have read the Vedas but you teach us the different meanings of it, that suits you. It is useless to study the Vedas if you have not understood the soul of them. You have established many branches of Arya Samaj at different places but you have not applied the principles of it at your homes. Despite being the Samajists and despite the fact that you have done graduation and post-graduation, the condition of your homes and especially the women in your homes have not improved. In your homes, the widows are suffering, and you consider yourself as enlightened by merely delivering lectures on widow remarriages outside. You spend a large amount on the marriage ceremonies, but you don't care to take knowing whether she wants to marry or not, you marry her. Personally, you believe in idol worship but outside you denounce idolatry. You appeal to others to shun useless traditions but in your homes, you yourself are clinging to them. You don't dare to break these shackles and you are quoting the books and letters of Dayanand Saraswati every now and then. You happily make arrangements for the marriage of your seven-year-old daughter and ten-year-old son, and outside you appeal to observe 'Brahmcharya'. O Aryans! Please do what you preach to others.) [25,26,27]

Thus, the above account highlights the significant contribution of the Arya Darpan, in the social reform movement. Though, a very valuable literature regarding Arya Samaj has been lost or burnt because of the riots in the pre-independence period of Indian history. But whatever has been left is also of seminal significance and some of which is unfortunately lying untapped in various archives or private collections. More research is therefore needed in this field, which will bring new facts and which will throw welcome light on the social reform movement in northern India and the role of Arya Samaj in it.

The Samajists not only took upon themselves the responsibility of highlighting women's pitiable position and status in the society and in raising women's questions, but also helped in changing the mindsets of the people by according them an equal position. It was because of the influence of the Samaj, that many women took an active part in the struggle against their feudal lords and also in the freedom struggle of India against the policies of the then British government. They braved the lathis, insults and humiliations, rough treatment of the police and even went to prisons for several months with their few months-old children. It is very significant that there are many examples, which show that the Samajist women went to prisons along with their husbands, their mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, and even with their entire family. It is important to note that on the call of the Arya Samaj, many of the Samajist women (from Shekhawati and other places), even went to Hyderabad to participate in the Satyagraha against the then Nawab. More research, therefore, is needed in this field which will bring new facts and will throw useful light on the history of social reform in India and also on the history of Arya Samaj.

IV. CONCLUSION

The above account also makes it very clear that had Arya Samaj not worked for the upliftment of the status of women, had it not worked to educate them and pulled them out of the shadows of men, had it not changed the mentality of men towards the so-called "weaker section" of the society, Mahatma Gandhi would not have been successful in motivating them to join the independence movement in large numbers. It was Arya Samaj which instilled and imbued in the hearts and minds of women that they were not 'abla' or weak and that they were strong enough to contribute their part in the freedom struggle. Unfortunately, historiography has not given much emphasis on this contribution of Arya Samaj in the freedom struggle of India and some of the historians have tried to brand it as a communal organisation. The Arya Samaj levelled the field, cleared the thorns and provided Gandhi with a smooth ground to lay the foundation of his mass movements against the British. [27]



REFERENCES

1. For a detailed study about the newspapers, magazines etc. started by Arya Samaj, in various places, readers are requested to consult Vidyalankar, Satyaketu and Vedalankar, Haridutt ,Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas, Vol.I, Arya Swaadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, second edition,1989 and also,Vidyalankar Satyaketu , Vedalankar, Haridutt and Bhartiya ,Bhawani lal, authors of Arya Samaj Ka Itihaas, Vol.II, (from 1883 to 1947) , Arya Swadhayaya Kendra, New Delhi,1989. Readers are also requested to see <https://agniveerfan.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/journalism> for more information on this subject.
2. Vidyalankar, Vedalankar and Bhartiya, op.cit., Vol. II.,p.417. For a detailed study about the role and contribution of the Arya Samaj, and about Arya Darpan, in social reform process, readers are requested to consult Goswami, Sambodh, Voicing the Unvoiced (Women's Questions and Arya Samaj), Yking Books, Jaipur, March, 2016. Fortunately, the copies of Arya Darpan quoted in this research paper, are with the author and the author has presented them in his book.
3. Vidyalankar, Vedalankar and Bhartiya, op.cit., Vol. II.,p. 226 and 254.
4. ibid. p.94.
5. ibid. p.65.
6. ibid. p.67.
7. ibid. p.69.
8. ibid. p.92.
9. ibid.p.93.
10. ibid. p.194.
11. ibid. p.332.
12. ibid. p.144.
13. ibid. p.417.
14. An article by Brigadier Chitranjan Sawant, VSM. Cf. <https://agniveerfan.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/journalism>.
15. Arya Darpan, April,1880,p.93.
16. Arya Darpan, June,1880, p.125.
17. Arya Darpan ,December, 1880,pp.267-272.
- 17(a). Unfortunately, we do not know whether the writer of this article was a male or a female for his or her name has not been mentioned in the article.
18. Chapters of *Le deuxième sexe* (translated as *The Second Sex*) were originally published in *Les Temps modernes*, in June 1949. It was very quickly published in America as *The Second Sex*, due to the quick translation by Howard Parshley. This book sets out a feminist existentialism which prescribes a moral revolution. As an existentialist, de Beauvoir believed that existence precedes essence; hence one is not born a woman, but becomes one. Her analysis focuses on the Hegelian concept of the Other. It is the (social) construction of Woman as the quintessential Other that de Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression. The capitalised 'O' in "other" indicates the wholly other. De Beauvoir asserted that women are as capable of choice as men, and thus can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the 'immanence' to which they were previously resigned and reaching 'transcendence', a position in which one takes responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses one's freedom.
19. Arya Darpan, December 1880,p.275.
20. Arya Darpan, December ,1880,p.276.
21. Arya Darpan, February, 1881,pp.29-34.
22. Arya Darpan, March , 1881, pp.53-56.
23. ibid. pp.60-62.
24. Arya Darpan, April, 1881, p.94.
25. Arya Darpan, June, 1881.
26. Arya Darpan, September 1881.
27. Arya Darpan, October, 1881.