

Arya Samaj

[UPSC Notes]

What is Arya Samaj?

Arya Samaj was the first reform movement that practiced proselytization. Arya Samaj's followers believed in God's extreme superiority and condemned idol worship. According to the Arya Samaj, Vedas are the ultimate source of knowledge, and every Hindu must read and recite Vedas. They educated Hindus about Vedas and fighting for women empowerment, worked for widow remarriages, and abolished the practice of Sati, child marriage, and polygamy.

The general overview of the Arya Samaj is as under-

| Highlight | Details |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Formation of Arya Samaj | 10 April 1875, Bombay |
| Founder of Arya Samaj | Swami Dayananda Saraswati |
| Purpose of Arya Samaj | Educational, Spirituality, Religious studies, and Social Reforms |
| Official website of Arya Samaj | http://www.thearyasamaj.org |

Founder of Arya Samaj

Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj on April in 1875. He established the Arya Samaj based on 2 basic tenets and these were-

- Monotheism
- Infallible authority of the Vedas.

He was a religious and social reformer from the Gujarat town of Tankara. Virajanand Dandeeshha highly influenced him. Dayananda Saraswati was tensed to see the deviation of Hinduism from its roots and wanted to do something for its betterment. He decided to work hard to restore the Hindu faith in Vedas.

His contribution to the Arya Samaj is as follows-

- He emphasized the concept of One God and condemned the practice of idol worship.
- He was against the role of the priest in Hinduism. He also warned society against the contributions made to the priests.
- He was strongly against the diversification of castes. He thought caste assortment was one of the major reasons for conversing the lower castes to Islam and Christianity at that time.
- He was the founder of the Vedic schools to educate all the castes' males and females. They give free shelter, clothes, food, literature, Knowledge of Vedas, and other ancient writings.
- He pushed society against the evil of untouchability and inequalities of caste.
- He established the Dayanand Anglo Vedic Trust and Management Society in Lahore in 1886 to stop the division of samaj and make the operations of the samaj a success.

- He worked for the better status of women and the protection of widows.
- He focused on humanity and assisted the victims because of artificial and natural disasters.
- He was a famous novelist. His notable work included Satyarth Prakash, Rig Veda Bhashyam, Rig Veda Bhashyam, and much more. Along with Sanskrit, his books were published in foreign languages like English, French, Arabic, Swahili, German, and Chinese.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj, but the contribution of Pandit Lekh Ram, Shri Shraddhanand, and Swami Virajanand Dandeesha made the Arya Samaj reach to people and spread the real meaning of Hinduism among masses.

Features of Arya Samaj

Arya Samaj was a socio-religious reform sabha that Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded to bring back the idea of Vedas in the Hindu religion. The key features of the Arya Samaj are as follows-

- Arya Samaj believes that the Veda is not liable to mislead or deceive and thus regarded as the Knowledge's ultimate source and spreads the truth. It must be read and recited by an Aryan.
- The founder was of the thought that Puranas (the post-Vedic texts) were the major reasons that led to the heresy of the Vedas. So, the samaj was against these post-Vedic tests.
- Arya Samaj believes God is the supreme power and the primary source of all Knowledge.
- It states that God is one and doesn't hold a physical existence. With this thought, Arya Samaj opposed Idol worship of God and was against the idea of reincarnation.
- The founder of Arya Samaj does not believe in the concept of destiny Niyati (fate).
- It supported the concept of Soul transmigration and Karma.
- It strongly condemns the domination of Brahmins over the spiritual and social life of Hindus. It doesn't believe that Brahmins are the connectors between the almighty and humans.
- It supports the idea of the Four Varna System, which works based on merit instead of birth.
- It believes in equality in the position of a man concerning the social lives and spirituality of Hindus.
- Just like other social reforms, Arya Samaj supports female education. Worked for widow remarriages and fought for the practice of Sati, child marriage and polygamy.
- Arya Samaj believed in women's equality and advocated gender equality against women.
- It supported spreading the Sanskrit and Hindi languages among the masses by providing good education. It worked phenomenally for educating people, especially women.
- It was strongly against the cruel practices of Animal sacrifices, feeding the dead through sraddhas, religious pilgrimages, sorcery and charms, and other prevailing sins.

As per Dayananda Saraswati, all these evil practices prevailing in the society were because of the lack of understanding of Vedic Knowledge. So, if there was a need to educate man, for this, Arya Samaj established the Vedic Schools in India.

Principles of Arya Samaj

Arya Samaj was established to bring Vedic Knowledge to the masses. It has the following guiding principles-

- Almighty God creates the Universe. He is Immortal and omnipotent. Thus, It the God alone that deserves to be worshipped.
- God creates all Knowledge.
- The genuine scriptures of wisdom are the Vedas.
- A true Arya must always be ready to reject the lies and embrace the truth.
- Dharma must be the guiding concept for the activities. This means that one should carefully consider what is evil and what is wrong.
- Arya Samaj aims to promote every individual's social and physical well-being.
- Every individual needs to be treated with respect, justice, and compassion.
- A person must accept Knowledge and avoid ignorance.
- Every person must take care of their welfare. But, he must consider the welfare of others as well.
- Rather than thinking about an individual's well-being, one must think about the collective well-being of humanity.

Controversies associated with Arya Samaj

To fulfill the aim of opening the doors for Vedic Knowledge, Arya Samaj took many steps, but not all were successful. Some of them created chaos and led to a lot of controversies. One of the biggest controversies associated with the Arya Samaj was the Shuddhi Movement. They adopted the Shuddhi programme to bring back the purity of Hindu people influenced by other religions.

The Shudder Movement was initiated against the Christian missionaries. Christian missionaries were guilty of converting the Hindus (especially from the lower classes) at that time.

Arya Samaj also worked to protect the cows by forming the "Cow Protection Association" in 1882. But, this violated the Muslim theologians, resulting in riots between Hindus and Muslims.

Significance of Arya Samaj

Arya Samaj was a revolutionized reform movement that brought many changes to the Hindu religion. The major significance of Arya Samaj includes-

- To prevent child marriage and improve the status of women in the country, the Arya Samaj set a minimum age for marriage. According to this, the marriageable age for a girl was 16 years, and for a boy, it was 25 years.
- The Arya Samaj had worked for human welfare after natural disasters like floods, famines, and earthquakes.
- It has always taken the lead in promoting education. Even after the death of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, educating the masses was a crucial area of concern for Arya Samaj.
- They founded the D.A.V. Colleges. The first D.A.V. College was established in Lahore in 1886.
- Arya Samaj successfully brought back the confidence and self-esteem of Hindus. It helped in eliminating the influence of westernization over Hinduism.
- It launched the Shudder movement to purify the Hindus influenced by other religions (Christianity and Islam).
- The Shudder movement also worked to convert the untouchables and the lower caste Hindus into pure caste Hindus.

Arya Samaj Mandir in Delhi

To support Hindu weddings, Arya Samaj mandirs were formed all over India (especially in Delhi). The Arya Samaj mandir conducts Hindu wedding ceremonies with all the rituals (as stated by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955). One can go to any respective mandir and perform the Hindu wedding ceremony with all the sacraments.

Arya Samaj around the world

Although the Arya Samaj was initially established in Bombay, India. Later, it spread to other parts of the country, with its headquarters in New Delhi. The movement has its roots in India and spread throughout the world in the countries involving Kenya, Armenia, Guyana, Nepal, Russia, the United States, Uganda, The Netherlands, Tanzania, Trinidad, Myanmar, Mauritius, South Africa, Malawi, and a lot more.

