

1. Arya Samaj – History

Prime Minister addresses the International Arya Mahasammelan 2025 in New Delhi. The Arya Samaj, a socio-religious reform movement founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, recently marked its 150-year legacy of promoting Vedic values and social reform. At the commemoration, the Prime Minister urged the organization to support the Gyan Bharatam Mission, which aims to digitize India's ancient manuscripts.

150th Anniversary & Gyan Bharatam Mission

To commemorate the 150-year legacy of the Arya Samaj, the International Arya Mahasammelan 2025 was held in New Delhi. The Prime Minister's address at this event highlighted a key initiative, the Gyan Bharatam Mission.

Gyan Bharatam Mission – This is a visionary national project, formally launched at the Gyan Bharatam Conference in September 2025, with a significant budget (e.g., a total outlay of Rs. 482.85 crore for 2024–2031).

Core Objectives – The mission is an expansion of the previous National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) and aims to –

Preserve – Systematically survey, document, and conserve India's vast and scattered ancient manuscripts.

Digitise – Utilise modern technology, including AI-assisted Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR), to create a massive National Digital Repository.

Disseminate – Make this preserved knowledge heritage globally accessible to scholars, researchers, and the public.

Call to Action – The Prime Minister specifically urged the Arya Samaj, with its long history in education and cultural preservation, to actively engage its youth and institutional network to support this mission.

National Vision – This initiative is framed as a crucial step towards the goal of 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) by 2047, reinforcing India's role as a 'Vishwa Guru' (world leader in knowledge) by blending ancient wisdom with modern technology.

About Arya Samaj – Foundations and Philosophy

Founder – Swami Dayanand Saraswati (born Mul Shankar Tiwari), a profound scholar and ascetic who sought to reform Hindu society by returning to its roots.

Establishment –

1875, Bombay – The first Arya Samaj unit was formally established.

1877, Lahore – The movement's "Ten Principles" were finalized, and the Lahore unit became the new headquarters, from where the movement grew rapidly across Punjab and North India.

Core Philosophy

"Back to the Vedas" – This was the movement's famous slogan. Swami Dayanand believed the four Vedas were the infallible, divine, and complete source of all true knowledge, both spiritual and scientific.

Rejection of Later Texts – He rejected the authority of later scriptures like the Puranas and commentaries, which he argued were human-made and responsible for corruptions like idol worship and the rigid caste system.

Motto – The official motto, "Krinvanto Vishvam Aryam" ("Let us ennoble the world"), reflected its ambitious goal of universal reform and moral upliftment.

The Ten Principles of Arya Samaj

The movement's philosophy is encapsulated in these ten core tenets –

1. God is the primary source of all true knowledge.
2. God is Existent, Intelligent, and Blissful. He is formless, omniscient, just, merciful, unborn, endless, unchangeable, immortal, and the creator of all. He alone is worthy of worship.
3. The Vedas are the scriptures of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all Aryas to read them, teach them, and recite them.
4. One should always be ready to accept truth and abandon untruth.

5. All acts should be performed in accordance with Dharma (righteousness) after deliberating on what is right and wrong.
6. The prime object of the Arya Samaj is to do good to the world, i.e., to promote the physical, spiritual, and social good of all.
7. Our conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness, and justice.
8. We should work to dispel Avidya (ignorance) and promote Vidya (knowledge).
9. No one should be content with promoting their own good alone; one should look for their good in promoting the good of all.
10. One should regard oneself under restriction to follow the rules of society made to promote the well-being of all, while in matters of personal welfare, everyone should be free.

Major Reforms Initiated by Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj was a radical "protestant" movement within Hinduism, seeking aggressive reform.

Religious Reforms

Rational Monotheism – It rejected polytheism and idol worship (murti puja) as un-Vedic. It advocated for a direct, rational relationship with a single, formless God.

Rejection of Ritualism – The Samaj denounced complex, priest-led rituals, pilgrimages, and superstitions. It also dismissed the authority of the hereditary Brahmin priesthood, arguing that a true "Brahmin" was one who possessed knowledge, not one born into a specific family.

Primacy of Havan/Yajna – The simple fire ceremony (Havan or Yajna), involving the chanting of Vedic mantras, was promoted as the central and most appropriate form of worship and purification.

Social Reforms

Caste and Untouchability – The Samaj vehemently opposed the hereditary, birth-based caste system (jati) and the practice of untouchability, deeming them social evils with no Vedic sanction. It did, however, support the Varna system as a merit-based social classification based on one's occupation and character.

Women's Empowerment – This was a cornerstone of the movement. It championed –

Women's Education – Aggressively campaigned for and established schools for girls.

Widow Remarriage – Fought against the forced and often cruel life imposed on widows, advocating for their right to remarry.

Opposed Child Marriage – Argued for raising the age of marriage for both men and women.

The Shuddhi Movement – This "purification" movement was a significant and controversial aspect of the Samaj. It had two aims –

1. To reconvert Hindus who had converted to Islam and Christianity.
2. To "purify" and integrate lower-castes and "untouchables" into the mainstream of Hindu society, granting them full religious and social rights.

Educational Reforms

The educational vision led to a major, constructive split within the movement after Swami Dayanand's death –

Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) Schools – Led by figures like Lala Hansraj, this "College Party" believed in blending Vedic ideals with modern, Western (Anglo) education, including science and English. This pragmatic approach aimed to prepare students for professional and government service, leading to the vast network of DAV schools and colleges that exist today.

Gurukul Kangri – Led by Swami Shraddhanand, this "Gurukul Party" advocated for a more orthodox system. They established Gurukuls (like the famed one in Haridwar) that emphasized traditional Vedic learning, Sanskrit, and an ascetic, disciplined lifestyle, separate from mainstream British-influenced education.

Role in Indian Nationalism and Social Change

The Arya Samaj was described by British colonial officials as a major "political" and "seditious" organization, as its reforms directly fueled national pride and resistance.

Cultural Nationalism – By promoting the Vedas as the pinnacle of human knowledge, it gave Indians a powerful sense of cultural and intellectual superiority, directly countering the British colonial narrative of "civilizing" a "barbaric" India.

Promotion of Swadeshi – The call for "India for Indians" and the emphasis on self-reliance made its members natural proponents of the Swadeshi (buy Indian) movement.

Linguistic Pride – It championed the use of Hindi in Devanagari script (as opposed to Urdu or English) as a national language, a key plank of nationalist mobilization.

Influence on Freedom Fighters – The Samaj's centres and educational institutions became hubs for radical nationalist thought.

Lala Lajpat Rai – Known as the "Lion of Punjab," his father was an Arya Samajist, and he was a dedicated member. His work in education (founding National College in Lahore) and politics was deeply inspired by the Samaj's ideals of social service and national self-pride.

Bhagat Singh – He was a student at the National College founded by Lala Lajpat Rai. The brutal police lathi-charge that fatally wounded Rai (while he was leading a protest) was the direct event that spurred Bhagat Singh and his comrades to seek armed revenge, marking a pivotal moment in the revolutionary movement.

Relevance of Arya Samaj in Contemporary India

The principles and reformist zeal of the Arya Samaj 150 years ago find direct echoes in modern India's national policies and global aspirations.

Women-Led Progress – The Samaj's foundational focus on women's education and rights is the historical parallel to modern initiatives like –

1. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** (Save the daughter, educate the daughter)
2. **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam** (Women's Reservation Bill)
3. **"Drone Didis"** (Empowering rural women with technology)

Educational Reform – The Samaj's vision of blending ancient Vedic values with modern science is mirrored in the philosophy of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes value-based, character-oriented education and integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the modern curriculum.

Vedic Ideals & Global Relevance – The motto "Krinvanto Vishwam Aryam" (Let us ennoble the world) aligns with India's current foreign policy of acting as a responsible global leader for the welfare of all. This ethic is visible in –

Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) – A global call for sustainable living, rooted in ancient ideals of living in harmony with nature.

One Sun One World One Grid – A global initiative for a shared green energy grid.

International Yoga Day – Promoting a holistic and spiritual approach to health and well-being for the entire world.

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