



## The Arya Samaj and the Origin of College Education of the girls in Jalandhar

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**Abstract:** The foundation of Arya Samaj in Punjab in 1877 A.D. by Swami Dayanand Saraswati was an epoch making event. The educated elites of the time enthusiastically filled the ranks of the Arya Samaj. The city of Lahore became the hub of Aryan activities. The Arya Samajis were in the forefront of socio-religious reform movements. They were the first to trigger the native educational enterprise. After the partition, the onus of the Arya Samaj activities shifted to Jalandhar. The remarkable achievement of the Jalandhar Arya Samaj was in the field of girls' education. They were the first to open schools and colleges for girls' in Jalandhar. The Kanya Maha Vidyalaya College, Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya College and Banarsi Das Arya Girls' College for women in a course of time became the leading women colleges of Punjab. It is interesting to note the untiring efforts of Dev Raj, Munshi Ram and Hans Raj in the promotion of girls' education in the city of Jalandhar.

**Keywords:** Arya Samaj, Girls' education, educational enterprise, achievements, K.M.V. College.

In the Rig-Vedic period women were held in high esteem and in every sphere of life they enjoyed equality with men. During this period women were sufficiently educated and civilized. They had similar education as men and often participated in philosophical debates. But in the later Vedic period women lost their status and respect and as a result their education also suffered.<sup>1</sup> In the Medieval times the girls' education was confined to Royal houses and nobility. With the coming of Mohammdans, the education of the women in India became more restricted. The Pardah system made their education a matter of difficulties. The system in its ultimate social influence became a symbol of distress in a withering influence on female education.<sup>2</sup> In the colonial Punjab, the British Government opened a number of educational institutions. The missionaries were the first to introduce western education in Punjab. Immediately, after incorporating the Punjab into the British Indian Empire, the British began to introduce and adopt the English administrative system. For the newly established administrative institutions such as the courts, the police stations and the railways, etc. there was a great demand for English educated professionals. In a course of time English language became a key to the jobs and pride in the society. As a result there was a great desire among the people to acquire

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Altekar, A.S., Education in Ancient India, Benares, Nand Kishor & Bros, 1944, pp. 205-206.

<sup>2</sup> Cowan, Minna G., The Education of the women of India, New York, F.H. Revell, 1912, p. 33.

English education which was being provided by both the missionaries and the government. The Christian missionaries were the first to open schools for girls such as at Ludhiana and Jalandhar etc. Another result of the western education was the emergence of socio-religious reform movements such as Brahma Samaj, Sat Dharam, Singh Sabha and Arya Samaj etc. Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dyanand Saraswati in 1875 A.D. at Bombay<sup>3</sup>. He founded Arya Samaj in Punjab in 1877 A.D. Amongst these socio-religious reform movements Arya Samaj pioneered the native educational enterprise. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was in favor of education of both the boys and the girls. According to him education was essential to both boys and girls<sup>4</sup>. The Arya Samaj was the first to take initiative for women education. Lahore was the hub of Arya Samaj activities. In 1892 A.D. Arya Samaj was split into two parties of Gurukul Party and College Party<sup>5</sup>. The College Party was the promoter of Vedic Studies and Western Science and Literature, on the other hand Gurukul Party (Mahatma Party) was all for Vedic education. Mahatma Party, led by Swami Shardhanand, was first to open the girls' school, while College Party initially did not show any interest in girls' higher education<sup>6</sup>. Thus, both the parties treaded their own paths. After the partition of India the onus of Arya Samaj activities fell upon the Jalandhar Arya Samaj which did not lag behind in promoting the education of the people of Punjab. In Satyarth Prakash (Light of Truth) Swami Dayanand had laid emphasis on the education of both the boys and girls. Keeping this in mind the Amritsar Arya Samaj was first to open three girls' schools in Amritsar in 1885A.D.<sup>7</sup> Exactly at the same time similar initiative were being taken by the Arya Samaj of Lahore, Ferozpur and Jalandhar.<sup>8</sup> In 1886 A.D. a resolution was passed in the Antrang Sabha (Executive Committee) of Jalandhar Arya Samaj to open a zanana school. Its expenditure of one rupee per month was sanctioned by the Sabha<sup>9</sup>. But the response to this school was very poor. The school had to be closed down for want of teachers and taughts. Thus the first attempt at opening a girls' school by Jalandhar Arya Samaj met with failures. The following year in 1887 A.D. again a proposal was made by Jalandhar Arya Samaj to open school for girls. The classes of school were started at Lala Dev Raj's house and Kahan Devi, the mother of Lala Dev Raj took the responsibility of operating it. Mai Ladi, who earlier taught at a mission school, was appointed as its first teacher. After sometime Samaj stopped the one rupee funds. But Kahan Devi promised to give four chappaties in a day and one rupee per month wage

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<sup>3</sup> Rai, Lajpat, History of Arya Samaj: A Account of its Origin, Doctrines and Activities with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder, New Delhi, Orient Longmans, 1967, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Shaida, Safaya, Modern Theory and Principles of Education, New Delhi, Dhanpat Rai Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 158-160.

<sup>5</sup> Seth, Joginder, Jalandhar Arya Samaj, Adda Hoshiarpur, Pratham Shatabdi Samarika (1885-1985), Jalandhar, 1985, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, Kenneth W., Arya Dharm Hindu Consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Punjab, New Delhi, Manohar, 1976, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Kishwar, Madhu, Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 21, No.17 (April 26, 1986) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4375593>

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Vidhyalankar, Satyaketu, Arya Samaj Ka Ithas, Vol. III, New Delhi, Arya Savadhya Kendra, 2016, p. 236.

to the teacher of girls' school. But despite Kahan Devi's efforts the school could not survive and was closed for lack of funds<sup>10</sup>.

Another attempt of promoting girls' education was made by Munshi Ram and Lala Dev Raj of Jalandhar Arya Samaj. An interesting incident proved to be a turning point in this regard. Relating the incident in his diary Munshi Ram wrote, "In October 21, 1888 A.D. as I came home from courts, Ved Kumari came running to me and started singing a song which she learnt. She sang as under:

Ik bar Isa-Isa bol tera kya lagega mol,  
Isa mera Ram Ramiya Isa mera Krishan Kaniya."<sup>11</sup>

Munshi Ram was shocked to hear this couplet from his daughter. He realized that at mission schools the daughters of Arya race were taught to condemn their own scriptures and deities. Thereafter, he resolved to open school for girls'. Rai Bhadur Bakshi Sohanlal pleader also agreed with him. Thereafter Munshi Ram made an appeal for the collection of funds for girls' school. In 1889 A.D. the Jalandhar Arya Samaj successfully opened a girls' school known as Arya Kanya Pathshala, in a rented place, near the railway fatak (gate) of Adda Hoshiarpur. Pt. Shri Pati was appointed as a teacher of this school on two rupees wage per month. A female teacher was also appointed on monthly wage of four rupees<sup>12</sup>. Dev Raj made great efforts for the success of this school. He went from door to door and requested the parents to send their daughters to school. In a move to attract the girls to this school, he offered sweets and toys<sup>13</sup>. Initially the promoters of this school had to face many difficulties. It was a tough job to get pupils for school. If one day a girl came to school the very next day her relatives took her away. The school was opened with 11 students. Slowly the number of students at this school began to increase and the school became a success. Behind this success were the untiring efforts of Lala Dev Raj and his mother Kahan Devi. Lala Dev Raj was appointed as school manager and two local Aryas, Master Heera Singh and Master Sant Ram took the position of school inspectors<sup>14</sup>. By the end of 1892 A.D. the number of students increased and reached to 55<sup>15</sup>. The Jalandhar Arya Samaj also solved financial crunch by adopting the techniques of "Refuse Fund" (Raddi Fund), and "Street Begging"<sup>16</sup>. The school started to enroll widows as well as unmarried girls. In 1892 A.D. Lala Dev Raj wanted to establish girls' high school, known as Kanya Maha Vidyalaya at an estimated cost of 25 thousand rupees. In 1893 A.D. he appealed for the donation of his Mahavidyalaya at occasion of Amritsar Arya Samaj annual function<sup>17</sup>. But the College party was not in favor of this institution. This became a bone of contention between College party and Gurukul party. But Lala Dev Raj was adamant and continued his efforts to establish Kanya Maha Vidyalaya at Jalandhar. Also Lala Lajpat Rai though favored primary education for girls had reservations regarding higher education for them. He published a letter in the Tribune March 23, 1894 A.D., "I mentioned and do so still,

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<sup>10</sup> Kishwar, Madhu, op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> Shardhnand, Swami, Kalyan Marg Ka Pathik, Delhi, Vijaykumar Govindram Hasanand, 2015, p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> Vidhyalankar, Satyaketu, op.cit, p. 237.

<sup>13</sup> ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, Kenneth W., op.cit, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> Kishwar, Madhu, op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, Kenneth W., op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> Vidhyalankar, Satyaketu, op.cit, p. 239.

that the spread of education among males had some strong and important inducements to back it, while the education of girls cannot necessarily drive any support for the same motives for education”<sup>18</sup>. Lal Chand also agreed with Lala Lajpat Rai’s opinion. Despite this the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya was founded in 1891 A.D. and began to make progress<sup>19</sup>. In 1896 A.D. Kanya Maha Vidyalaya managing committee was registered which was known as Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Mukhya Sabha. The main objective for the establishment of Kanya Maha Vidyalaya was as under:

1. “To import physical, mental and religious instruction.
2. To give instruction in handicrafts such as needlework plain sewing etc.
3. To give instruction in household economy such as cooking etc.
4. To give instruction in hygiene and elementary rules of health.”<sup>20</sup>

The management of this institution also opened a hostel for girls, which was the first girls’ hostel of the Punjab. Initially curriculum at the school was devised by Lala Dev Raj which suited the day to day life of the girls. His booklet “Hasi Khel Mein Shiksha” covered the entire life of a child. Most of the books of Kanya Maha Vidyalaya were written by Lala Dev Raj<sup>21</sup>. Those books were based on nationalism, religion and morality. The main subject taught in this institution were Hindi, education of religion, History, Geography, Sanskrit, math, English and Music. At this time the teachers of Kanya Maha Vidyalaya were also known Acharyas of Kanya Gurukul. The medium of instruction was Hindi. Through this institution Devnagri and Hindi came to be known as the language of women of Punjab<sup>22</sup>. The college had its own titles and certificates.

Eventually the College Party realized the importance of women education. Lala Lajpat Rai also regretted on his previous thoughts about women education. During the Sawdesi Movement, when Kanya Maha Vidyalaya girl students participated under Principal Lajjawati and he realized the value of education of women<sup>23</sup>. Finally the College Party decided to open a girls’ institution. They opened a girl college at Lahore in 1927 A.D.<sup>24</sup> After the death of Mahatma Hans Raj this College got the name of Hansraj Mahila Mahavidyalaya. This college was affiliated to the Panjab University. After partition in 1947 A.D. this college was shifted to Jalandhar<sup>25</sup>. All the subjects of arts and humanities were taught in this college including Darshan Shiksha (Vedic), Hindi and Sanskrit. But presently this college is affiliated to Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar. After the death of both the eminent leaders of College party such as Lala Lajpat Rai and Mahatma Hans Raj, the interest to open educational institutions for girls weaned.

After Independence in 1964 A.D. Bnarsi Das Arya Girls’ College was founded by Arya Samaj at Jalandhar Cantonment. This College got full-fledged affiliation and

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<sup>18</sup> Tribune, March 23, 1894, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Vidyalankar, Bheemsen, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab Ka Sachitra Ithas, Lahore, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab, 1992, p. 393.

<sup>20</sup> Kishwar, Madhu, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> Vidhyalankar, Satyaketu, op.cit, p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> Vidhyalankar, Satyaketu, op.cit, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> Rai, Lala Lajpat ‘National Education’ an article in ‘The Modern Review’ April 1919, Vol. No. 4, p. 337.

<sup>24</sup> Vidhyalankar, Satyaketu, op.cit, p. 518.

<sup>25</sup> ibid.

came into existence in 1970 A.D. This College is affiliated with Guru Nanak Dev University. The founder Chairman of the College was the owner of B.D.A. steels, Lala Bishamber Dass a well-known businessman of the Punjab.

**Conclusion:** Thus, Arya Samaj Jalandhar pioneered the girls' education in the Punjab. In their bid to promote female education they had to encounter many social taboos and prejudices in a male dominated society. Lala Dev Raj, his mother Kahan Devi and Munshi Ram (Swami Shardhanand) remained steadfast and adamant and contributed tremendously in the growth and development of girls' education in the Punjab.

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