



ANTARRASHTRIYA ARYA MAHASAMMELAN 2010 FAS-NED
INTERNATIONALE ARYA MEGACONFERENTIE 2010

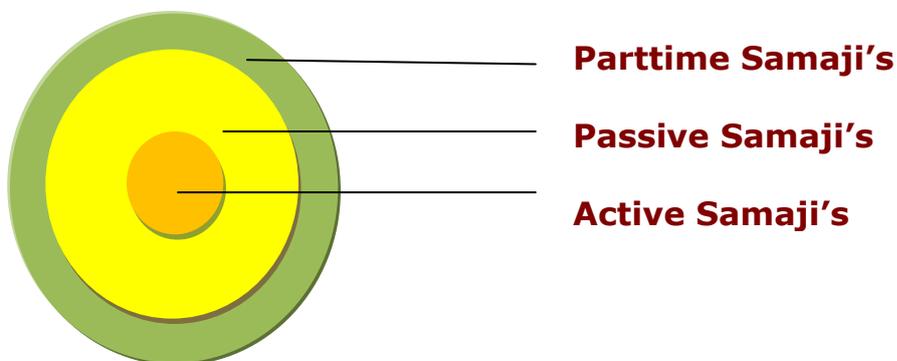
The future of the past of the Vedic dharma

Outline Presentation: A new agenda for the Arya Samaj

Prof. Chandersen Choenni (The Netherlands)

The social reforms that have been carried by the Arya Samaj in the course of time are widely recognized. However, social reforms are an on going process and are dependent on the changing circumstances in a society, such as economical issues, diversity issues and so on. As pointed out in some studies-, the Arya Samaji's in the Netherlands –and in the Western world- are living in a complex society, in which time is a scarce commodity and knowledge about the Vedas among the Arya Samaji's is decreasing.

The Arya Samaj community in the Netherlands can be divided into three circles according to the concentric circles model, the so-called inner, outer and in between circles.



We observe that the inner circle consisting of the “*Active Samaji's*” -those who are the most active in gathering knowledge about and living according to the principles of the Vedas- is becoming smaller, while the outer circle consisting of the “*Parttime Samaji's*” is growing. Only on some occasion like cremation and religious festivals the Part-time Samaji's feel they are Samaji's or Hindu. It is very hard to mobilize them for more active participation. In between the active and part-time Samaji's, we find the the so-called *Passive Samaji's*. A segment of the group of Passive Samaji's can be mobilized to become more active when the themes are more contemporary and challenging.

In order to increase the inner and decrease the part-time circles, and therefore to keep the principles of the Vedas alive and to promote more Vedic values in the life of the Arya Samaji's of the next generation, the (social) reform agenda should undergo a major revision. Furthermore: we must reach out beyond these three circles. The Arya Samaj and Maharishi Dayananda had universal

pretensions, for example the universal brotherhood (*sarva bhutam kutum bakham*). I propose therefore an agenda for the Arya Samaj that is feasible in the near future, not only for the Arya Samaji's but also for the broader community. More specific I will now answer two questions of the conference:

1. Can the Vedic Philosophy be redefined for the present and future generations in context to the modern conditions and environment?

The answer is yes, but we have to focus on actual themes and challenges. The Vedic Philosophy need not to be redefined per se, but must be updated. For example Vedic texts that refer to (cart) wheels as a cycle or cattle e.g. cows as a metaphor for richness are outdated. We have to refer to other examples. But in essence we have enough subjects to refer to and solutions in accordance with the Vedic Philosophy. I sum up ten subjects to focus on:

- The Vedic conception of creation of the universe and of God and the traitvada philosophy (nature/*prakirti*, the souls/*atmas* and the supreme soul/*paramatma*) must be promoted. This is more in accordance with scientific reasoning. Science and technology are posing more doubts on the Adam and Eve theory and creation of the universe in six days. Thus the Vedic Philosophy is an alternative for the broader community.
- Ecology (human behaviour must be in balance with the environment) and holistic thinking is inherent in de Vedic Philosophy and must propagated.
- Respect for the nature, no wasting of resources and struggle against the destruction of mother earth (*dharti mata*) must be articulated by the Samaji's. That means struggle against climate change and pollution of the environment in daily life and in organizational networks.
- Promoting sobriety and fighting overconsumption and promoting recycling of goods are Vedic virtues. Vegetarism and love and respect for other living beings (animals) too.
- Abstinence of violence (*Ahimsa*) and promoting peace and harmony between countries and people must become a moral issue in the speeches of Arya Samaji's.
- Competence in good government and fighting corruption are also moral issues and needs special attention.
- Promoting spiritualism that means that stimulating meditation, yoga and studying spiritual literature must be made more attractive in particular for the younger generation.
- Fighting for gender equality means nowadays struggle against abortion of female placenta and killing of female babies (for example in India) because of male preference. Fr example changing the tradition of passing the family name through the male line, because this leads to male preference and these inhuman practices.
- Fighting racial discrimination and in particular discrimination on skin colour (especially in India!!) is a Vedic obligation and does not differ a lot from caste discrimination.
- Seva (help and development) in poor countries and regions and solidarity with the poor is a virtue that Arya Samaji's must take more serious and incorporate in their social work.

2. How can we as efficiently as possible pass on the Vedic knowledge to next generations?

I give some recommendations:

- Pundits and social workers must do outreach work and visit those who are sad or have problems at home. In particular when the younger generation experience this kind of social and pastoral help and not only performing rituals, they will become more curious about Vedic knowledge.
- Promoting eucomene. Working together with other Hindu groups and other religious groups to promote values, norms and morality and being tolerant can have a mobilizing effect. The younger generation is for example not focused on the differences between the Hindu streams, but the similarities and what is common is more important (Choenni 1998).
- Knowledge dispersion: Satsangs (Group gatherings), websites and virtual communities may become major platforms to disseminate messages, information and knowledge. Learning en singing some standard *bhadjans* like aarti (the universal prayer) can function as a common marker and bond.
- Flexibility in religious thinking and fighting fundamentalism is attractive for the younger generation. For example the struggle against idol worship is not a priority anymore, but acceptance that everybody can have their own way to relate to God.
- Despite all the efforts the Arya Samaj is primarily an international movement with an (Hindu) Indian background and is perceived as an ethnic religion or philosophy for Indians. The philosophy of universal brotherhood can get an impetus when Arya Samaji's and in particular the younger generations are stimulated to participate in organizations of the wider community. They must adopt the subjects I mentioned above. For example in the Netherlands participation in the party for the animals (*partij voor de dieren*).
- Most books that are published about the Vedic knowledge are still too difficult to read for those who do not have a higher education. Obviously the Vedic themes are complex. But most authors are showing off their knowledge and their erudition and scholarship in stead of disseminating knowledge in a simple manner. That is the big challenge.
- The message of universal brotherhood and unity and global thinking will appeal to younger generation. Thus the Arya Samaj must get rid of the incorrect image of a sectarian group and ethnic religion.

Prof. Chandersen Choenni, Haarlem, September 15, 2010, Free University.