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Reassessing Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Role in Shaping Colonial Indian Society

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Abstract: Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) played a crucial role in shaping colonial Indian society through his advocacy for social reform, education, and women's empowerment. Emerging against the backdrop of British colonial rule, Dayananda responded to societal challenges such as caste discrimination and gender inequality by promoting a return to Vedic teachings. He founded the Arya Samaj in 1875, aiming to revitalize Hinduism and foster national consciousness. His reformist agenda included condemning untouchability and the caste system, asserting that social status should be determined by character rather than birth. Dayananda's educational initiatives emphasized moral principles, establishing institutions that provided education for both boys and girls, thereby challenging societal norms around women's roles. He opposed practices like child marriage and enforced widowhood, advocating for widow remarriage and increased rights for women. His teachings have left a lasting legacy in modern India, influencing social justice movements and promoting gender equity. Despite his focus on Hindu nationalism, Dayananda's vision contributed to a broader Indian identity that united various communities against colonial rule. Contemporary studies reveal the enduring impact of his educational and social reforms, highlighting their significance in current discussions on equality and justice. Dayananda's life and work exemplify a commitment to rational inquiry, social reform, and the empowerment of marginalized groups, establishing him as a pivotal figure in the socio-religious landscape of India.

Keywords: Arya Samaj, caste discrimination, education, social reform, untouchability, women's empowerment

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1. Introduction

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) emerged as a pivotal figure in the socio-religious landscape of colonial India. The British colonial era brought about profound transformations in