

# Arya Samaj and the Politics of Identity: A Critical Study of Nationalism, Religion, and Social Reform

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the complex relationship between religion, identity, and nationalism through a critical analysis of the Arya Samaj. Founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, the movement sought to reform Hindu society by returning to Vedic principles while simultaneously engaging with colonial modernity. The study explores how Arya Samaj contributed to the construction of a distinct religious and cultural identity that intersected with emerging nationalist consciousness. It also critically evaluates the movement's role in shaping communal boundaries and identity politics, particularly through practices such as Shuddhi. The paper argues that Arya Samaj functioned both as a progressive force for social reform and as a catalyst for identity-based mobilization, thereby playing a pivotal yet contested role in the development of Indian nationalism.*

**Keywords:** Arya Samaj; Nationalism; Identity Politics; Religion; Social Reform; Colonial India; Shuddhi Movement