

# Swami Agnivesh

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Social activist and Arya Samaj leader Swami Agnivesh passed away at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in New Delhi. He was 80. The Arya Samaj leader is known for his work against bonded labour.

## Contributions of Swami Agnivesh

- He was a Brahmin brought up by a grandfather who was the Diwan of a princely state, but who **identified completely with the marginalised and the downtrodden.**
- Swami Agnivesh **founded Arya Sabha in 1970, a political party based on Arya Samaj principles.** Agnivesh was elected to the Haryana Assembly in 1977 and was made the State's Education Minister after two years.
- He is known for his **work against bonded labour through the Bonded Labour Liberation Front**, which he founded in 1981.
- The organisation worked on issues surrounding bonded labour in India, especially in the quarries in and around Delhi.
- Agnivesh became **president (2004–2014) of the World Council of Arya Samaj**, which is the highest international body of the Arya Samaj. He was also an advocate for dialogue between religions.
- He was involved in various areas of social activism including **campaigns against female foeticide and the emancipation of women.**
- He served as the **chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery** from 1994 to 2004.
- As a religious and spiritual thinker, Swami Agnivesh married his Hinduism to his socialist beliefs, in what he called **Vaidik Samajvad, or Vedic Socialism.**

## Arya Samaj

- It is a vigorous reform movement of modern Hinduism, **founded in 1875 by Dayananda Sarasvati**, whose aim was to **reestablish the Vedas, the earliest Hindu scriptures, as revealed truth.**
- The Arya Samaj **opposes worship of murtis** (images), animal sacrifice, child marriage, pilgrimages, priestly craft, and temple offerings.
- It **upholds the infallibility of the Vedas, the doctrines of karma** (the accumulated effect of past deeds) and samsara (the process of death and rebirth), the efficacy of Vedic oblations to the fire and programs of social reform.
- It has worked to further **female education and intercaste marriage**; has built missions, orphanages, and homes for widows; has established a network of schools and colleges; and has undertaken famine relief and medical work.