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Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Muslim Education and Contemporary Impact

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Abstract

The originator of the Aligarh Movement, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, worked tirelessly to ensure that Indian Muslims received an education. After the First War of Independence in 1857, when the British Empire seized control of all of India, he was the only educator to have observed the depiction of Indian Muslims. Because of his capacity to see the future, he directed Indian Muslims toward the modern English language that arrived in India with Britain in order to learn about science and the psychology of white men. He was without a doubt the one who served as a link between Britishers and sub continental Muslims. Sir Syed's initial and final goals were to support Muslims in their pursuit of knowledge by

founding various institutions. He worked hard to ensure that Indian Muslims would endure until their last breath. Sir Syed's responsibility in the field of education has always been to advance Muslim students' educational goals. In order to do this, this study examines Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's tireless contributions to Muslim education and the dissemination of literary principles to the Muslim community worldwide, but also examines him with a critical eye.

Keywords: Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Aligarh Movement, Muslims, India

Introduction

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadur (1817-1898) is a visionary who paved the way for rationalist philosophy, changed the direction of education, and established the rules for modernist Urdu prose. He not only developed a new philosophy and pedagogy for public teaching and produced some amazing discursive prose, but he also changed people's attitudes toward social, cultural, and national identity, particularly in the Muslim community. He was an iconoclast who supported a reasonable, scientific approach to life and made room for it over passionate sentimentalism. He became known and respected as one of the key reformers of contemporary India as he also had an impact on poets and writers. Sir Syed was also the founder of the eminent and prominent Aligarh Development; he impacted sub continental culture and culture in more ways than one. This development not just opened new skylines to Urdu language and writing, yet additionally made a condition for growing new talks and in another phrase for bigger allure. He consequently brought writing and scholarly distractions near one another to

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bear upon the contemporary real factors of life. Sir Syed himself articulated his logical ideas in a straightforward and organic style of prose. His colleagues adopted his literary style as well. Sir Syed's Aligarh Movement served as a source of inspiration for many significant thinkers and authors, including Maulavi Nazeer Ahmad, Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali, Allama Shibli Nomani, and Maulavi Zakaullah, who all contributed to the socio-literary culture of Urdu. Among Sir Syed's many writings, it is necessary to highlight some of his important works that have garnered more public notice, such as *Risala Khair Khwahan-e Musalmanan-e-Hind*, *Asar-us-Sanadid*, *Ain-e-Akbari*, *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*, *Khutbaat-e-Ahmadia*, *Tafsir ul-Quran*, and *Tarikh I Sarkashi-ye Bijnor*, among many others. With these works, Sir Syed aimed to spotlight misconceptions about the British and enlighten Muslims of the sub-continent on their faith.

Early Life and Influences

Sir Syed was born on October 17, 1817, in Delhi, the *Mughal* Empire's capital during the reign of *Mughal* Emperor Akbar II. His parents were Syed Muhammad Muttaqi and Aziz-un-Nisa¹. Sir Syed was the youngest of three children and was nurtured at the home of his maternal grandparents in an affluent neighborhood of the city together with his older brother Syed Muhammad bin Muttaqi Khan and older sister Safiyatun Nisa. They were exposed to politics while being raised in strict adherence to *Mughal* regal traditions. Sir Syed's early life was greatly influenced by his mother Aziz-un-

¹ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 15-16

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Nisa, who raised him with strict discipline and a strong emphasis on contemporary education. He was also inclined towards *Sufism*, which had an influence on Sir Syed when he was a little child. Early on, he was influenced by his maternal uncle Khwaja Zainuddin Ahmad, a mathematician and musician. His family had been closely associated with the *Mughal* Empire's official positions for many centuries. Khwaja Fariduddin, his maternal grandfather, was a *Wazir* (minister) in the court of Emperor Akbar II². His paternal grandfather Syed Hadi Jawwad bin Imaduddin was given the honorary name of "Mir Jawwad Ali Khan" and served as a *Mansab* (general) in the court of Emperor Alamgir II. Sir Syed's father, Syed Muhammad Muttaqi, was close to Emperor Akbar Shah II and acted as personal advisor to him³, as well. Sir Syed, however, was born when his father was the head of the East India Company, which had replaced the *Mughal* state's traditional position of power and reduced its ruler to a mere figurehead. These insurrections were supported and directed by the East India Company, which would later end up changing the sub-continent forever.

The *Naqshbandi* legacy of Shah Ghulam Ali Dahlavi, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi and his teachings, and the *Mujahidin* movement of Syed Ahmad Bareilvi are all visible in Sir Syed's early theological writings as influences on his viewpoint.⁴

² Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 2

³ Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 4

⁴ Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, 31

Career

Sir Syed made the decision to join the East India Company after realizing the rapid weakening of *Mughal* political power. He showed his value as a diligent and conscientious worker in the courts, which led to a series of Sir Syed climbed up the ranks, starting off as a *Serestadar* (clerk)⁵, eventually becoming a *Sadr Amin* (chief commissioner)⁶. During his time working for the courts and getting to know high-ranking British officials, Sir Syed gained in-depth knowledge of British colonial politics. He also stood up for the British officers of Bijnor and helped save many of the officers' and their families' lives from the rebel soldiers in 1857 during the War of Independence. This act would give the British a positive impression of him and would also improve their perception of Muslims as a whole. He was appointed *Sadr-us Sudoor* (chief judge) in 1858. In 1876, Sir Syed left the government and moved to Aligarh. He was then nominated as part of the Imperial Legislative Council which he served until 1893⁷.

War of Independence

Before delving into the specifics of his contributions to the subcontinent, it is critical to give some background information regarding what shaped his political ideals and way of thinking. The War of Independence in 1857 was the most significant example of this. Not only did it improve the British perception of him, but also shaped his persona.

⁵ Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 5

⁶ Nizami, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 28

⁷ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 34-35

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Indians engaged in this conflict with the British in an effort to overthrow their rule. Other names for it include Indian Revolt, Indian Mutiny, and Indian Rebellion. The war was primarily sparked by political, social, economic, military, and religious factors. Indians made a tremendous effort, but they failed for a variety of reasons, such as rivalry, discord, a lack of centralized leadership, etc.

This conflict was confined to a small number of locations, primarily Meerut, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, etc. The key incident that ignited the war was the Sepoys' reluctance to fire the grease-coated cartridges (greased with pig and cow fat) on January 23, 1857. When forced to use greased cartridges, an Indian sepoy in Barrackpore murdered two British officers⁸. On April 8, 1857, he was taken into custody and put to death. This rumor spread like wildfire through the woods.

This sparked outrage and sub continentals took to the streets in violent riots. As mentioned earlier, Sir Syed was posted in Bijnor in 1857 where he saved the lives of British officers and families. He did, however, lose several members of his own family during the conflict⁹, and as a result, he had a strong distaste towards using violence to improve people's living conditions.

Political efforts

As mentioned earlier, Sir Syed was assigned to the court in Bijnor during the uprising of 1857 where he saved the lives of British officers and

⁸ D'Souza, *Mangal Pandey*

⁹ Nizami, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 34-35

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families. His account of the mutiny was published in 1858 as *Tarikh I Sarkashi-ye Bijnor* (History of the Bijnor Rebellion)¹⁰. He was extremely concerned about what the rebellion would mean for his fellow Muslims in particular. He sought to establish friendly ties between the Muslim community and the British government while defending Muslims and Islam by writing several pamphlets to clear misunderstandings on both sides.

During the 1857 uprising, Sir Syed sided with the East India Company. Many sub continental nationalists were not happy with this. Sir Syed explored the reasons for the Indian uprising and published his findings in *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* (The Causes of the Indian Revolt) in 1859. He disproved the widely held belief that the plot was orchestrated by Muslim elites who were angry over the decline in power of Muslim monarchs in this essay. He attributed the aggressive development of the East India Company to them, as well as British leaders' lack of understanding of sub continental culture. To avoid what he dubbed "*haramzadgi*" like the mutiny, Sir Syed recommended the British to appoint Muslims to assist in governance¹¹. 500 copies of this pamphlet were printed; he sent one to the government of India, sent a majority to England and he kept the rest to himself. Sir Syed knew fully well that his safety was not guaranteed if he sent the pamphlet to the British, but still did so, and said that he would gladly suffer whatever would befall

¹⁰ Sherwani, *The Political Thought of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Vol. 5, No. 4 (April—June, 1944)*, 306-328

¹¹ Hoodbhoy, *Why Sir Syed loses and Allama Iqbal wins in Pakistan*

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him, for it was for the greater good of his people. The pamphlet was not made available for the public until 1873¹².

The Risala Khair Khwahan-e Musalmanan-e-Hind (An Account of the Loyal Mohammedans of India), written by Sir Syed in 1860 from Meerut, details the lives of the Muslims who supported the British during the 1857 insurrection. It was released in three issues, the first and second of which came out in 1860 and the third of which came out in 1861. The bravery of the Muslims who supported the British was emphasized in the first issue, and an article on jihad with a clear distinction between jihad and revolt was featured in the second issue¹³.

Historical works

Sir Syed's preferred field of study was history. *Asar-us-Sanadid* and *Ain-e-Akbari* are his most significant historical publications and are what made him famous as a scholar.

He published *Asar-us-Sanadid* (The Remnants of Ancient Heroes), a book in 1847 that details Delhi's medieval antiquities. The work describes the buildings outside the city of Delhi, the buildings around the Delhi Fort, the monuments in Shahjahanabad, and presents a brief historical account of the various settlements of Delhi and the notable residents of Delhi, including *Sufis* like Shah Ghulam Ali and Saiyid Ahmad Shahid, as well as academics,

¹² Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 24

¹³ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 200

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musicians, calligraphers, musicians of note, and physicians. The first lithographically printed book images in India, which numbered around 130, were drawn by Faiz Ali Khan and Mirza Shahrukh Beg. In 1854, he published the second version of *Ansar-as-Sanadid*. However, there are significant differences between the two editions, with the second being shorter and more objective¹⁴.

The *Ain-i-Akbari* is the third volume of the *Akbar-nama* containing information on the third great *Mughal* Emperor, Akbar's reign in the form of administrative reports, similar to a gazetteer. Blochmann says, ***'it contains the 'ain' (i.e. mode of governing) of Emperor Akbar, and is in fact the administrative report and statistical return of his government as it was about 1590.'***¹⁵. There are five books in the *Ain-i-Akbari*. The maintenance of the imperial household is covered in the first book, *Manzil-abadi*, while the emperor's servants, including those in the military and civil services, are covered in the second book, *Sipah-abadi*. The third is about imperial administration and contains rules for the judicial and executive branches. The fourth section provides details on Hindu literature, science, social norms, and philosophy. The fifth has Akbar's quotes. Even as an old book and antique, the book was not particularly valuable. Sir Syed actually received a reprimand from Ghalib for wasting his time, talent and abilities on useless things. He even

¹⁴ Troll, *A Note on Early Topographical Work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: Asar-al-Sanadid*, 135-146

¹⁵ Blochmann, *The Ain-I Akbari by Abu'l Fazl Allami, Vol. 1, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society*

placed the "sahibs of England" on a pedestal that at the time controlled the entire world.

Religious works

In 1842, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wrote a number of treatises on religious topics in Urdu, which marked the beginning of his writing career. His theological ideas are much more conventional in his early writings but gradually branch out as he comes into closer contact with the West. His early works reflect his upbringing in Delhi and the *Sufi* movement. The principle themes of these books include the promotion of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the one and only way to live, as well as the desire to rid sub continental Muslims' life of new religious customs in an effort to maintain the purity of Islam in India.

His later theological writings, such as his commentary on the Torah and Gospel and his dissertations on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), were sparked by Christian missionary activity in India and the hostile view of Islam held by British historians.

Perhaps his most important religious work, Sir Syed began composing a *tafsir*, or commentary, on the Quran. Seven volumes of *Tafsir ul-Quran* were released; the first was released in 1880 and the final was released in 1904, six years after his passing. He examined and interpreted 13 *surahs* and 16 *paras* of the Quran in this book. In the first book, he also published a thorough article titled *Tahrir fi Usool al-Tafsir* (The Notes on the Principles of

Commentary), in which he outlined 15 principles upon which his commentary was built¹⁶. The main point Sir Syed wanted to make with his *tafsir* was that if the Muslims of the world adopt the Quran's message in its true essence i.e. truly ponder God's created world and study it meticulously Islam will emerge as a modern, scientific and most importantly peaceful faith and will better Muslims' status in the sub-continent.

Political beliefs

Shan Muhammad says in his book, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Political Biography that Sir Syed was first and foremost an educator and reformer rather than an academic thinker, and his political philosophy was influenced by the conditions of his day. His political outlook was significantly influenced by the 1857 Rebellion, among other significant events¹⁷.

Initial beliefs on Hindu-Muslim unity

Sir Syed initially supported Hindu-Muslim harmony and the sub continent's communal culture, seeking to further the interests of all Indians¹⁸. The Muhammadan Association was established by Sir Syed in the same year to encourage political cooperation among Indian Muslims living in various regions of the nation. He propagated his idea of modern education and Muslim

¹⁶ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 3-4

¹⁷ Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahad Khan; a political biography*, 193

¹⁸ Shirali, *The Enigma of Aligarh*

political unification by organizing the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference in Aligarh in 1886. His contributions made him the most prominent Muslim politician in India during the 19th century, and they frequently shaped Muslims' perspectives on numerous societal concerns.

Opposition to political activism

Sir Syed advised Muslims *against* getting involved in politics directly. Instead of focusing on politics, he believed that the Muslim community would benefit most from better levels of English education¹⁹. He declined to endorse the Syed Ameer Ali-founded National Muhammadan Association, a political organization, and the Muhammadan National Conference in Lahore, which he saw as a political campaign²⁰.

He did not voice any opinions when the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, but over time, he became a vocal opponent of the Congress and actively criticized the organization. Sir Syed argued in favor of using constitutional mechanisms, such as taking part in administration, to voice complaints to the British government²¹. He backed Indian political leaders' efforts to increase Indian representation in the government and civil service. He established the Muhammadan Civil Service Fund Association in 1883 to promote and assist Muslim graduates who wanted to join the Indian Civil

¹⁹ Muhammad, *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, 10

²⁰ Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; a political biography*, 229

²¹ Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; a political biography*, 128

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Service (ICS). He founded the Muhammedan Association to represent the Muslim community's complaints to the Imperial Legislative Council.

Hindi-Urdu controversy and Two-Nation Theory

Syed Ahmad Khan first promoted harmony between Hindus and Muslims in British India. He declared: "*Hindus and Muslims are India's two eyes, and she is a stunning bride. This lovely bride will turn ugly if one of them is gone.*"²². He would later change his mind, however. The Urdu-Hindi controversy is thought to have changed Sir Syed's opinions on Muslim nationalism. Sir Syed encouraged the usage of Urdu through his own writings after the *Mughal* dynasty's fall. The Scientific Society only translated Western texts into Urdu during Sir Syed's tenure. Sir Syed created schools that provided instruction in Urdu. According to Sir Syed, the desire for Hindi, which was mostly driven by Hindus, represented a decline in India's long-standing Muslim cultural dominance. Sir Syed made the contentious claim during testimony before the British-appointed education commission that "*Urdu was the language of the gentry and Hindi that of the vulgar.*"²³. Hindu leaders reacted angrily to his comments and banded together to demand Hindi's official recognition. Sir Syed grew more passionate about promoting Urdu as the language of all Indian Muslims and as a representation of Muslim heritage as a result of the success of the Hindi movement. His political and

²² Shirali, *The Enigma of Aligarh*

²³ Rai, *Hindi Nationalism (Tracts For The Times)*, 41

educational efforts became more and more focused on only Muslim concerns. He also tried to get the British to use and support Urdu extensively in official capacities. Urdu had grown to be an essential component of political and cultural identity for Muslims in the northern and western parts of the sub-continent. Conflict between Muslims and Hindus in India, however, was stoked by disagreements over whether to use Hindi or Urdu.

The concept of a distinct nation for Muslims on the subcontinent was first proposed by Sir Syed. In a lecture given in 1866 at Meerut, he discussed the post-colonial era's general backdrop and referred to Muslims and Hindus as two nations²⁴. He is credited for founding the Two-Nation Theory and Muslim nationalism, which resulted in the division of the sub-continent. Sir Syed was opposed to the idea of democratic self-government, which would have given control of the government to the Hindu-majority population, on top of being afraid of the loss of Muslim political power due to the community's backwardness²⁵.

Reform and Refinement

Syed Ahmad Khan started to have a strong dedication for education in the 1850s. Sir Syed came to recognize the benefits of the Western-style education being provided at newly founded colleges across India as he pursued studies in a variety of areas, including European law. Sir Syed, who

²⁴ *Sir Syed Ahmed on the present state of Indian politics (consisting of speeches and letters)* Pioneer Press 1888, 29

²⁵ *Unknown author, Beacon in the dark: Father of the two-nation theory remembered*

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was a devoted Muslim, criticized the way conventional dogma and religious orthodoxy had influenced Indian Muslims to be wary of British influences. Sir Syed started to worry more and more about the future of Muslim communities. As a descendant of the Mughal dynasty, Sir Syed was raised in the highest traditions of Muslim elite culture and was aware of the Muslim community's steadily declining political influence throughout India. Muslim communities in India were at risk of being marginalized for many generations due to the hostility between the British and Muslims before and after the Indian Rebellion of 1857.²⁶

Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College

Perhaps one of his largest contributions, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College was not only backed by the British, but also saw a large amount of Hindu support. In fact, the first graduate of the school was a Hindu²⁷.

Sir Syed traveled to England on April 1, 1869 with his sons Syed Mahmood and Syed Hamed, and on August 6, the British government bestowed upon him the *Order of the Star of India* (knighthood)²⁸. He visited universities while traveling the country of England and was moved by the post-Renaissance ethos of learning. The following year, Sir Syed returned to India with the intention of creating an institution that would provide Indians

²⁶ Kumar, *Educational Philosophy in Modern India*, 59

²⁷ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 49

²⁸ Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 64-65

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with a modern education and be modeled after Cambridge and Oxford²⁹. The *Khwaastgaran-i-Taraqqi-i-Talim-i-Musalman* (Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among Muslims) was founded on December 26th, 1870, after his homecoming. It was transformed into a Fund Committee for the opening of a school by 1872.

On December 24, 1870, he started publishing *Tehzeeb-ul-Akhlaq* (Social Reform) with the intention of promoting reforms in Muslim society and promoting awareness of contemporary issues. In order to harmonize tradition with Western education, Sir Syed attempted to forward a reinterpretation of Muslim thought. In various volumes on Islam, he made the case that the Quran is based on a respect for logic and natural law, making scientific research crucial to becoming a good Muslim.

By 1873, plans for the development of an Aligarh college were published by the committee led by Sir Syed. The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Collegiate School was finally founded on May 24, 1875, in Aligarh after members of the committee completed a nationwide fundraising tour. The institution changed its name to the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College two years later, in 1877³⁰. The following year, he gave up his practice as a lawyer to focus solely on expanding the college and enacting religious reform.

²⁹ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 47

³⁰ Hasan, *The Aligarh Movement and the Making of the Indian Muslim Mind*, 43-44

Muhammadan Educational Conference

Sir Syed saw the need for an all India organization to spread the principles of his movement after establishing the Anglo-Oriental College. He founded the All India Muhammadan Educational Congress, which has its main office in Aligarh, for this goal. The organization's major goal was to elevate the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College to the rank of university and advance Muslim educational advancement through conferences held across India. To avoid confusion with the Indian National Congress, the organization's name was changed to All India Muhammadan Educational Conference³¹.

Scientific Society

Sir Syed stepped up his efforts to encourage cooperation with British authorities and inspire Indian Muslims to support the Empire. Sir Syed established one of the first Islamic institutions to teach science, a modern *madrassa*, in Muradabad in 1859 as part of his commitment to working for the advancement of Muslims. Sir Syed was involved in social causes as well. In 1860, he helped plan aid for the famine-stricken residents of North-West Province³². He founded a madrasa when stationed in Ghazipur in 1863; it later evolved into the Victoria High school. Additionally, he established the Scientific Society in Ghazipur to advance national educational reforms.

³¹ Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahad Khan; a political biography*, 83-84

³² Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 34

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Iltilmas Ba Khidmat-e-Sakinan-e-Hind Dar Bab-e- Taraqqi Taleem in Ahl-e-Hind (Address to the natives of Hindoostan on education) is a pamphlet he wrote on the importance of receiving a western education education³³.

As soon as he was transferred to Aligarh in 1864, Sir Syed got down to business as an educator. Transferred from Ghazipur to Aligarh, the Scientific Society was given the new name Scientific Society of Aligarh. Sir Syed gathered Muslim academics from around the nation, modeling it after the Royal Society and the Royal Asiatic Society. The Society published a journal on scientific topics on a regular basis in both English and Urdu, sponsored yearly conferences, and donated money to educational organizations. Sir Syed believed that Muslims' traditional opposition to contemporary science and technology posed a threat to their socioeconomic future. He struggled to discover rational explanations for jinn, angels, and the miracles of the prophets and wrote a number of essays advocating liberal, logical readings of Islamic scriptures.

Opposition and Criticism

Given everything mentioned above, it comes as no surprise that Sir Syed is highly celebrated to this day. That does not imply however that he was without his faults. Sir Syed was condemned both in his lifetime and in the present for promoting animosity between Muslims and Hindus.

³³ Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reason, Religion and Nation*, 45

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As mentioned before, historiographers have identified him as one of the first proponents of the Two-Nation Theory, which held that Hindus and Muslims belonged to separate and incompatible nations. According to historians, Sir Syed was emotionally unable to embrace the idea that Muslims, who had previously been the colonial rulers, would soon be ruled by a Hindu majority in an independent India. He was also concerned that Hindu culture would weaken the Perso-Arabic aspects of Muslim culture, which had long held a privileged position under Muslim rulers. His criticism of Indian nationalists and assertion that Muslims and Hindus cannot coexist widened the sociopolitical gap between the groups that had already developed as a result of the Urdu-Hindi controversy. He also lacked a lot of consistency in his political thoughts and beliefs.

At the same time, Sir Syed received harsh criticism from devout Muslims who saw blasphemy in his liberal interpretation of Islamic law. Many other traditional Islamic schools condemned him as a kafir—that is, as being outside the fold of Islam³⁴. Additionally, he was charged with converting to Christianity³⁵. Sir Syed's contentious beliefs, such as his rejection of miracles, denial of angelic existence, minimization of the importance of prophethood, etc., sparked contempt from traditional followers of *Waliullahi* reform movements, such as *Ahl-e Hadith* and *Deobandis*. Sir Syed received a particularly harsh attack from *Ahl-i Hadith*.

³⁴ Ahmed, *Islam in Global History*, 231

³⁵ Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 90

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The Muslim community's quest for political power in India, according to Sir Syed's supporters, was supported by his political vision, which gave it an autonomous political voice. In order to establish the All India Muslim League as a political party distinct from the Congress, his worldview served as the foundation. Both the religious fundamentalists of the Khilafat campaign and the liberal, pro-British politicians of the Muslim League were influenced by Sir Syed's ideas. The Muslim League continued to oppose the Congress and call for a boycott of the struggle for Indian independence. The Aligarh student body committed itself to the creation of Pakistan in the 1940s and made significant contributions to the Muslim League's operations. Due to Sir Syed's support, Urdu is widely spoken in Indian Muslim communities, and after India was partitioned, Pakistan adopted it as its official language.

Furthermore, Sir Syed believed that men's education came before women's education. He thought that women would be pleased with merely receiving a basic and fundamental education. In fact, Nasreen Ahmed says,

“...This explanation does not seem convincing enough for it was not that Syed Ahmed Khan was just indifferent or only showed lack of enthusiasm towards modern education for Muslim girls. He, in fact, condemned it in strong terms and that is enough evidence to show that,

*towards the last sixteen years of his life, he had no sympathy with girls' schools or modern education for girls...*³⁶

Thus, while he was inclusive of all Muslims regardless of class, he did not extend the same luxury to women which belied his support for education and demonstrated the hypocrisy of his viewpoint.

Suggestions

Without a doubt, Sir Syed has had a significant impact on how the subcontinent has developed and in my *humble opinion*; his contributions are second only to Muhammad Ali Jinnah's. His efforts to integrate the Muslims with the British, while controversial, proved to be of great benefit to them. God alone knows what would have become of the Muslims of the subcontinent without his half a century long effort. When they had no one to listen to them, he gave the Muslims a voice. Sir Syed worked to improve the Muslims' reputation and make their demands heard at a time when they were marginalized and suffering while the Hindus of the subcontinent were making significant advancements and enhancing their relationship with the British. Despite this, he wasn't flawless.

Sir Syed may have started out being more consistent with his political beliefs and thoughts. While political evolution is normal and to be expected, it did drive some Hindus away and alienate them from his cause and the college,

³⁶ Nasreen Ahmed, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Muslim Female Education: A Study in Contradictions, 1110

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which was regarded as the epitome and pinnacle of progressive thought for the subcontinent and a light of hope.

In addition, orthodox Muslims could have been a part of the Aligarh movement without hurting their sentiments. Despite the fact that the main thrust of his message that God's created world is meant to be explored and that we should view things with a more scientific and measured lens, it comes as no surprise that some Muslims would feel offended when Sir Syed claimed that all of God did not make miracles happen and provided more “logical” and liberal explanations for Islamic events and history.

Education for all people is a fundamental requirement, similar to how food and water are, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's stance on women's educational rights should have been more inclusive of women. This would have given future generation's access to a greater pool of brilliant minds and inspiring leaders who could have advanced civilization and led it to the next stage, resulting in ever-greater improvements. By not doing so, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan may have significantly undermined subsequent Pakistan Movement attempts, and the consequences of this can still be observed today.

Legacy

Sir Syed is well remembered as a renowned Muslim social reformer and visionary throughout South Asia. Elite Muslims who supported the All India Muslim League were influenced by his educational philosophy and

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forward-thinking viewpoints. In order to advance Western education, particularly science and literature, among India's Muslims, he established the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference in 1886. The meeting inspired Muslim elites to advocate for expanding educational advancement elsewhere, known as the Aligarh Movement, in addition to raising money for Sir Syed's Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College. This increased understanding of Muslim demands in turn sparked a political awakening among Muslim intellectuals that eventually gave rise to the All India Muslim League and steered Muslims in India toward the establishment of Pakistan. He also had an impact on a number of future political figures.

He established a university that is now a major player in India and functioned as the powerhouse of Muslim India. Muslim political figures Maulana Mohammad Ali Jouhar, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Maulana Shaukat Ali, and Maulvi Abdul Haq are notable Aligarh alumni. Among the most well-known alumni of Aligarh are the first two prime ministers of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan and Khawaja Nazimuddin, as well as the president of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain. The university and its alumni observe Sir Syed Day each year on the anniversary of his birth. He is also the namesake of numerous educational institutions in Pakistan and India, including Sir Syed College in Taliparamba, Sir Syed CASE Institute of Technology and Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology.

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Conclusion

By working tirelessly for more than 50 years, Sir Syed paved the way for contemporary Pakistanis. His achievements must not be minimized or understated, and his legacy is still honored and celebrated today. Without Sir Syed's helping hand, one can only speculate about where we, as Pakistanis, may be now. He was incredibly knowledgeable and did well by teaching what he knew to everyone in the subcontinent, regardless of class, color, or religion (unfortunately, not gender however). He would later modify his mind about Hindu-Muslim unification, but he was still a strong ally of the Hindus, and he is still revered in what is now India.

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