



Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his Contributions: An Essay

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a great visionary and scholar of his time was born on 17th October, 1817 in Delhi. He hailed from a royal and distinguished family. He had enjoyed all the amenities and facilities available to him at home. Being a member of royal family, he was given the best education of the time. In results, he achieved good command over religious literature including religious philosophy, Arabic and Urdu literature as well. He studied Fiqh and Asul-i-Fiqh, Quran, Urdu and Arabic literature from the best scholars. Sir Syed exerted all the pleasure in his adolescents. But the death of his father Syed Muhammed Khan in 1838 with whom he was deeply loved and affectionately associated changed the entire course of his life. He left his comfy life and started living more responsible life. Demise of his father was also considered as one of the turning points of his life where he got influenced a lot.

As personality, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was universally accepted as a social reformer, thinker, philosopher, educationist, great visionary and so on. He wrote many books like Sunnat Dar Radd-e- Bidat, Tafsir-al Quran, Khutbat-e-Ahmadia, Kalamat-e-Haq, Asbab-e-Baghwat-e-Hind (Musa, 2019) besides these, he also wrote Ahkam Tu'am ahl-Kitab, An Account of The Loyal Mohammedans of Indian Part I, An Account of The Loyal Mohammedans of Indian Part II, An Account of The Loyal Mohammedans of Indian Part III, History of Bijour Rebellion, Ital E Ghulami, Ik Nadan Khuda Parast, Khalqan Insan Ala Mafil Qura'n, Al Dua Wal Istajaba, (AMU, 2021) By his writings, he made his intentions clear that he was a social reformer and wanted to remove the impractical practices whether associated to rituals and traditions. His manifestation of ideas was based on reasoning and logics. He himself kept away from the impractical and illogical practices of the society and also wanted to keep away the people of the society. He also wrote Urdu essays like Rasoomaat and Bahes-o-Takrar wherein he manifested his ideas about the ill practices of the society particularly in Muslim community. In order to make the Muslims convinced to adapt modern education and to impart moral education, Sir Syed introduced the Tahzib-ul-Akhlaque in December, 1870 that was devoted to inculcation of good habits into people and removal of ill practices from the Muslim community. In connection to Shia and Sunni controversy, his work Tuhfa-i-Isna Ashriya of an Urdu translation was also devoted to combating the controversy. He also compiled Athar-ul-Sanadid in 1844, the most crucial and a non-religious work. Apart from these, contributions of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan covering different aspects as discussed in following manners.

2. EDUCATIONAL ASPECT:

Sir Syed posited that education is the only instrument by which all the ailments and diseases of the Muslim society can be cured. He wanted the Muslim people must follow the modern education system. As he considerably thought out that only modern education leading scientific temperament can be beneficial to Muslims in the process of restoring the faded glory of the Muslim community. He also practically visualised that modern education would fetch government jobs to Muslims and would help them to become judges and civil servants. Sir Syed was a great religious practicing man and tried to disillusion the contradictions between the Islam and Sciences. Alam (2019) mentioned that "the purpose of education was not to refute religious findings but to validate it. In other words, the purpose of education was to prove that there was no contradiction between the work of God (world) and the word of God (Quran)" (p.114). In connection to educating the people, he established the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875 which later converted as Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. He also established school at Muradabad in 1859, at Ghazipur in 1863 and also set up Scientific Society at Ghazipur in 1864 for empowering the Muslims with scientific temperament by translating and making available the scientific knowledge in Urdu and Persian language to the people. In 1866, the Scientific Society published a journal named as Aligarh Institute Gazette. The main objective behind the publishing the journal was to arouse the sentiments of goodwill and friendship among the British for the Muslims (Musa, 2018). In his education manifesto, women were devoid of the modern education and also he never penned down on women education as he had the notion that women were in no need to avail modern



education. Sir Syed had reflected clarity over education system of time and advocated two tier curriculums: curriculum for general education devoted to cater the needs of secular and spiritual aspects of Muslims; and Curriculum for special education to empower the Muslims by benefiting from the government run education system. According to him only those teaching methods should be used which had the ability to make the learners creative and constructive. He had good administrative and managerial skills too and had stressed upon the democratic, sympathetic and humanitarian style of administration for the education institutions. It was his opinion that vernacular medium of education should be adapted while English should be studied as the bridge to library language for the advanced scientific knowledge (Nasrin, 2012).

3. SOCIAL ASPECT:

Sir Syed truly regarded education as the instrumental in pacing the process of modernization, progress and development among Muslims. But he also advocated the need to keep intact with distinct cultural identities. His had broad vision and adapted holistic approach. He mentioned that conservative and conventional attitude of Muslims was the greatest obstacle to the material, social, and intellectual progress of the Muslims (Hashmi, nd.). He posited character building along with the modern education. In connection to social reforms, he was against the polygamy and socially ban of widow remarriages. He was aware that social reforms come through knowledge, awareness and character building. Therefore, he advocated to the Muslims to adapt refined, valid and scientific modern education. After returning from England, Sir Syed got involved himself in publishing the Tahzib ul Akhlaq along with Muhsinul Mulk. The few numbers of Journal which had stirred the orthodox classes deeply and in results severe opposition was raised but Muhsinul Mulk faced and countered with his sweetness and logical writings. Sir Syed knew that social reforms and removal of social evils can be realised by the effective writings. Thus the magazine was fully devoted to the Muslims' social reforms and articles were for the cause of social reforms of the Muslims.

4. POLITICAL ASPECT:

The atrocities of British government towards Muslims on account of 1857 revolt in which Muslims were made scape goat by the British Rulers. Muslims were accorded responsible behind the eruption of Revolt. Seeing that, Sir Syed felt pain and penned down the Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind in order to clarify the misunderstanding of the British Government and proven that Muslims were not the reason behind the revolt. He also criticised the policy blaming the Muslims as the cause of revolt. Sir Syed had the view that English Language and modern sciences was essential to keep alive the cultural and political identity of Muslims but "In 1873 when protest against the use of Urdu in Government Courts was vehemently renewed by the Hindus, Sir Syed established the League for the Defence of Urdu. The advertisement written by him to rouse the Muslims to the protection of Urdu, and announced: "The loss of the Urdu Language for the Muslims would be tremendous. No other loss except the loss of their religion could be compared to it" (Hassaan, 1959). However, he remained attributed as to keep away Muslims from the national politics. He thought that education would eradicate the ignorant and problems of Muslim community not by participating in national politics. In addition, as Musa (2018) mentioned that "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's the "two nations" theory had a big effect on large number of Muslims in South Asia subcontinent, and even set off the British Indian nationalism movement. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's successor, such as Iqbal and Jinnah not only inherited the "two nations "theory, but put into practice, then established the Pakistani eventually. On one hand, the British India Muslims' political consciousness had been greatly improved, and maintained their power in cooperation with the Indian National Congress Party actively. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan called on Muslims not to participate in the Indian National Congress Party, and strived to improve their level of education, so that they had the power to get jobs in the British India government and to obtain a higher level of wealth in the industry" (p.88).

5. CONCLUSION:

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan has been regarded as a visionary, saviour of cultural and lingual identity, secular, jurist, journalist, civil servant, educationist, philosopher, religious scholar, reformer and many more. He had a versatile personality. He spent his child hood with all the enjoyments but the sad demise of his father in 1838 had transformed him a lot. He received the best education of his time from the best scholars. He was a visionary man and knew the real causes behind the downfall of Indian Muslims. He wanted to restore the past glorious legacy of Muslims community. Revolt of 1857 gave him much pain. Muslims were made the accused and planners for the eruption of revolt by the British rulers. Sir Syed had tried to maintain the goodwill of Muslim community in the eyes of British rulers by compiling Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind, a book in which he had effectively tried to mention that Muslims were not the reasons behind the revolt of 1857. After returning from the England, Sir Syed started Tahzib-ul-Akhlaque in 1870 along with his friend Muhsinul Mulk. He knew that deeply rooted traditions, superstitions, conservativeness,



passiveness towards education were the only reasons of being backwardness and downfall of Muslim community. He tried to convince the Muslim community to shun all the ill and impractical religious and social practices and encouraged them to receive the modern education through his writings published in Tahzib-ul-Akhlaque. Sir Syed envisioned that past glory of Muslims community could be restored if Muslims accept the modern education along with traditional education and he had proved that up to a certain level by establishing schools at Mordabad and Ghazipur, Scientific Society at Ghazipur and Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh. Aligarh movement was also the brain child of Sir Syed and his companions wherein emphasis was given on promotion of modern western education along with Islamic philosophy of education, adapting English language along with Urdu and protection of Cultural and Linguistic identity of Muslim community, harbouring the idea of secularism and nationalism.

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