

## TOPIC 7:

# SIR SYED AHMED KHAN 1817-1898:

### Early Biographical details:

- **Born in 1817** in Delhi.
- By the age of 18 he was skilled in Arabic, Persian, Mathematics and Medicine.
- In 1838 his father died and he was forced to seek an employment and became the judge in Delhi in 1846.
- This year (1846) he wrote his book on Archeology called ***Athas-ul-Sanadeed***.
- In the war of Independence 1857 he was working as a chief Judge in Bijnaur & saved lives of many English women & children.
- As a reward of his loyalty, British offered him a state with a large income but he refused.
- Later he was appointed Chief Justice in Muradabad and then transferred to Ghazipur.
- In 1864 he was transferred to **Aligarh** where he worked to establish a new college.
- **Aligarh** became the Centre of a '**Muslim Renaissance**'.
- He died on 27<sup>th</sup> March **1898**.

### Beliefs:

Sir Syed was extremely unhappy about the position of Muslims in the subcontinent. Since the days of the Mughal declined the social and economic status of Muslims had declined sharply and the role of Muslims in the war of independence had left further decline as British took measures to ensure that their control was unchallenged.

Sir Syed Ahmed felt that the poor status of Muslims was due to they were treated as second-class citizen by British and Hindus and they had to take some responsibilities themselves. Most Muslims thought that British were no more than just invaders and they had nothing to do with them. Sir Syed Ahmed believed that Muslims had to accept that the British were there rulers and could only improve if they have a positive approach towards them. They needed to accept the British idea and their education if they wanted to improve. Sir Syed wanted to see Muslims untied and prospering in their social, economic and religious fortune. He made this his Life's ambition and founded Aligarh movement to create educational and political awareness among Muslims of India.

### Educational Reforms/Aligarh College:

Sir Syed's greatest achievement was his **Aligarh Movement**, which was primarily an educational venture. He established ***Gulshan School at Muradabad in 1859, Victoria School at Ghazipur in 1863, and a scientific society in 1864***. When Sir Syed was posted at Aligarh in 1867, he started the ***Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental School*** in the city. Sir Syed got the opportunity to visit



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England in 1869-70. During his stay, he studied the British educational system and appreciated it. On his return home he decided to make **M. A. O. High School** on the pattern of British boarding schools. The School later became a college in 1875. The status of University was given to the college after the death of Sir Syed in 1920. M. A. O. High School, College and University played a big role in the awareness of the Muslims of South Asia.

A brief chronology of Syed Ahmad's efforts is given below:

**1859:** Built **Gulshan School in Muradabad.**

**1863:** Set up **Victoria School in Ghazipur.**

**1864:** Set up the **Scientific Society in Aligarh.** This society was involved in the translation of English works into the native language.

**1866:** **Aligarh Institute Gazette.** This imparted information on history; ancient and modern science of agriculture, natural and physical sciences and advanced mathematics.

**1870:** **Committee** Striving for the Educational Progress of Muslims.

**1875:** **Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental School** (M. A. O.), Aligarh, setup on the pattern of English public schools. Later rose to the level of college in 1877 and university in 1920.

**1886:** **Muhammadan Educational Conference.** This conference met every year to take stock of the educational problems of the Muslims and to persuade them to get modern education and abstain from politics. It later became the political mouthpiece of the Indian Muslims and was the forerunner of the Muslim League.

Syed Ahmad Khan's Aligarh Movement played a significant role in bringing about an intellectual revolution among the Indian Muslims. Thus it succeeded in achieving its major objectives, i.e. educational progress and social reform. His efforts earned Sir Syed the title "**Prophet of Education**".

**"Sir Saiyad was a prophet of education "** (Mahatma Gandhi)

**"The real greatness of the man (Sir Saiyad) consists in the fact that he was the first Indian Muslim who felt the need of a fresh orientation of Islam and worked for it"** (Sir Allama Iqbal)

### **Reconciliation Policy:**

Unlike other Muslim leaders of his time, Sir Syed was of the view that Muslims should have friendship with the British if they want to take their due rights. To achieve this he did a lot to convince the British that Muslims were not against them. On the other hand, he tried his best to

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convince the Muslims that if they did not befriend the British, they could not achieve their goals. Sir Syed wrote many books and journals to remove the misunderstandings between Muslims and the British. The most significant of his literary works were his pamphlets "Loyal Muhammadans of India" and "Cause of Indian Revolt". He also wrote a commentary on the Bible, in which he attempted to prove that Islam is the closest religion to Christianity. Tabyin-ul-Kalam and "A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad" helped to create cordial relations between the British Government and the Indian Muslims. They also helped to remove misunderstandings about Islam and Christianity.

### Political Reforms:

Sir Syed asked the Muslims of his time not to participate in politics unless and until they got modern education. He was of the view that Muslims could not succeed in the field of western politics without knowing the system. He was invited to attend the first session of the Indian **National Congress** and to join the organization but he refused to accept the offer. He also asked the Muslims to keep themselves away from the Congress and predicted that the party would prove to be a pure Hindu party in the times to come. By establishing the Muhammadan Educational Conference, he provided Muslims with a platform on which he could discuss their political problems. It was from this platform that Syed Ahmad Khan strongly advised the Muslims against joining the Hindu dominated Congress. He was in favor of reserved seats for Muslims and also promoted the idea that Hindus and Muslims are two distinct nations. This idea led to the Two-Nation Theory.

### URDU HINDI CONTROVERSY 1867:

During the last days of the Muslim rule, Urdu emerged as the most common language of the northwestern provinces of India. It was declared the official language, and all official records were written in this language. In 1867, some prominent Hindus started a movement in Banaras in which they demanded the replacement of Urdu with Hindi, and the Persian script with the Deva Nagri script, as the court language in the northwestern provinces. The reason for opposing Urdu was that the language was written in Persian script, which was similar to the Arabic script and Arabic, was the language of the Quran, the Holy Book of the Muslims. The movement grew quickly and within a few months spread throughout the Hindu population of the northwestern provinces of India. The headquarters of this movement were in Allahabad.

This situation provoked the Muslims to come out in order to protect the importance of the Urdu language. The opposition by the Hindus towards the Urdu language made it clear to the Muslims of the region that Hindus were not ready to tolerate the culture and traditions of the Muslims.

The Urdu-Hindi controversy had a great effect on the life of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Before this event he had been a great advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity and was of the opinion that the "**two nations are like two eyes of the beautiful bride, India**". But this movement completely altered his point of view. He put forward the Two-Nation Theory, predicting that the differences between the two groups would increase with the passage of time and the two communities would not join together in anything wholeheartedly. Sir Syed was the first person who used the words "**My Nation**" for Muslims and the words "Two Nation" in the subcontinent. His main idea was the protection and the safeguard of rights of Muslims in the sub-continent.

**Expected Questions and Answers:**

**Question No. 1:** Were the educational developments the most important contribution of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in his attempt to improve the relations between the Muslims and the British? Explain your answer. 14

June 2000 Q.1 (c)

**Question No.2:** Why did Sir Syed Ahmed Khan try to improve relations between the Muslims and the British? 7

November 2000 Q.2 (b)

**Question No.3:** Why did Sir Syed Ahmed Khan develop his *Two Nation Theory*? 7

June 2001, Q.2 (b)

**Question No.4:** Was the attempt to achieve a better understanding with the British the most important contribution that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan made to the Muslim cause during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Explain your answer. 14

June 2005 Q.1 (c)

**Question No.5:** Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's political beliefs had a greater impact on the Muslims than any of his other beliefs. Do you agree or disagree? Give reason for your answer. 14

November 2007. Q.2 (c)

**Question No.6:** Why did Sir Syed wish to develop a better understanding with the British following the War of Independence (1857-58)? 7

June 2008 Q.2 (b)

**Question No.7:** was the development of a western education system the most important contribution of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in developing the cause of Muslims during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Explain your answer. 14

June 2009 Q.2 (c)

**Question No.8:** was the religious view of Sir Syed his most important contribution in developing the cause of Muslims during 19<sup>th</sup> century? Explain your answer. 14

November 2010. Q.3 (c)

**Question No.9:** Why did Sir Syed found Aligarh Movement? 7

June 2011 Q.2 (b)

**Question No.10:** Sir Syed Ahmad Khan admired many British ways of doing things. At the same time he had a great faith in the Muslim religion. He was convinced that if the British ever left

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India the Muslims would be dominated by the overwhelming Hindu majority. He decided to do something about this. He published a pamphlet called 'The Loyal Mohammedans of India.'

(a) What was 'The Loyal Mohammedans of India'?

November 2011 Q.2 (a)

4

**Question No.11:** Read the source below carefully to answer question (a).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was determined to improve the status of Muslims. He had a desire to re-establish good relations with the British which, he hoped, would lead to greater opportunities for Muslims. He also believed that Muslims should have good relations with Hindus. However, he was concerned about the 'Hindu-Urdu Controversy.'

(a) Describe the 'Hindu-Urdu Controversy.'

November 2012 Q.1 (a)

4

**Question No.12:** Was the Two Nation Theory the most important contribution of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan?

Explain your answer.

June 2013 Q.2 (c)

14

**Question No.13:** Read the source below carefully to answer question (a).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan decided to change Muslim attitudes towards receiving British education. He travelled to England to study the university system there. He believed in setting up a university for Muslims in the sub-continent and was impressed by the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. However, on his return home he found that his plans were met with suspicion from some people. Nevertheless he wanted to pursue the idea of providing better education for Muslims.

(a) What was the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental School?

November 2013 Q.2 (a)

4

**Question No. 14:** Why did Sir Syed Ahmad Khan try to improve relations between the Muslims and the British?

Oct Nov 2014 Q. 1(b)

7

**Answer to Question No. 5:**

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's political beliefs had a great impact on Muslims. This service of Sir Syed aimed at restoring the prestige, social position, political importance & economic well-being of Muslims. In the beginning Sir Syed believed that all people living in India (Hindus & Muslims) were one nation. But the Hindi – Urdu controversy convinced him that the two communities would not pull on together under one government peacefully. Thus he changed his political belief to Two Nation Theory .This theory later became the basis of creation of Pakistan. Sir Syed's other important political services include his advice to Muslim not to join the congress. He realized that Muslim minority will always be dominated by Hindu majority under the modern democratic system which the congress was demanding at that time & the British were trying to introduce in India. Therefore he suggested to the British government that some arrangement should be made to ensure Muslim representation in all assemblies. This later resulted in the rule of separate electorate for Muslims which was introduced in 1909 reforms.



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Congress also suggested that appointment in the government services should be made through competitive examinations. In this Muslims had no chance because they lagged behind the Hindus in education. Sir Syed suggested to the government that Muslims should be given jobs according to their ratio in population till they reach the same educational standard as the Hindus. Thus Sir Syed's political beliefs had a profound impact on Muslims.

But Sir Syed's services in other sectors were not less important. In fact Sir Syed gave so much importance to modern education that his efforts & contribution to Muslim education is considered to be the most important service for the betterment of Muslims of India. He established Scientific Society & published Aligarh Institute Gazette in order to introduce modern scientific developments to the Muslims. He visited England in 1869 on his own expenses to study the British educational system and to observe the working of British universities. His most important contribution in education sector was the founding of MAO College at Aligarh in 1877. Later he founded the Mohammedan Educational Conference. Its objective was to discuss and solve the educational problems of Muslims in the Sub-Continent. His effort for the cause of Muslim education served double purpose. It helped the Muslims in their economic well-being & raised status in society. It also helped in removing the mistrust between the British & the Muslims. In this way education was the most important aspect of all of Sir Syed's services for the Muslims of India.

Another service of Sir Syed after 1857 was the removal of misunderstanding between the British and the Muslims. He came to the conclusion that Muslims were being handicapped because of the misunderstanding & lack of trust between them (Muslim) & the British. The Muslims thought that the British had taken over the rule of India from Muslim rulers. Therefore the Muslims opposed & hated everything associated with the British. The Muslims kept away from English & modern education which the British were introducing in India on the other hand the British held the Muslims responsible for the uprising of 1857 & considered them (Muslims) to be their enemies. The result of this misunderstanding was that Muslims were being crushed in every way.

Therefore Sir Syed's foremost task was to remove the misunderstanding by addressing both the British and the Muslims. Sir Syed wrote books and explained to the British that the real cause of the events of 1857 was the wrong policies & attitude of the British themselves. To Muslims Sir Syed explained that Christianity & Christians should not be hated. He specially stressed that Islam does not stop them from learning modern sciences & English language. He clearly emphasized that Muslims should come towards modern education, the lack of which was causing continual set back to the Muslims of India.

Therefore it can be said that Sir Syed's political beliefs had a great impact on Muslims, but his other services especially in the field of education were more important.