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The Educational views of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan

Indian Muslim pragmatist, Islamic reformist, and philosopher of the nineteenth century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was born on October 17, 1817, in Delhi. He came from a family of nobles of the Mughal court. After the death of his father, he joined the services of the East India Company in 1838, as a judicial officer. And remained loyal to them during the revolt of 1857, whereas the British rulers regarded the Muslims as their 'real enemies and most dangerous rivals' and followed a policy of discrimination against them. He believed that the future of Muslims was doomed by the rigidity of their orthodox outlook, and began to promote Western-style scientific education by founding modern schools and journals and organising Muslim entrepreneurs.ⁱ

Then most important movement for the spread of modern education and social reform among Muslims was started by *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*. Syed Ahmad Khan was deeply concerned at the depressing situation of the Muslims and raising them from their backwardness became his life-long passion and aim. He believes backwardness in education tended to degrade the Muslims in the social as well as political sphere. He pointed out that progress in each field is possible only through education.ⁱⁱ He strove hard to remove the hostility of the British rulers towards the Muslims. He appealed to the Muslims to return to the original Islamic principles of purity and simplicity. He advocated English education for the regeneration of Muslims in India. His emphasis on science particularly offended the orthodox Muslims. He faced opposition from the orthodox sections of Muslims. However, with courage and wisdom, he overcame these obstacles.

The status of education in 19th century

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had been a period of deep social and political crisis throughout the Muslim community. Sayed Ahmed Khan

arrived at a solution in the educational reform. Its only means to solve the problem of Muslims in India by establishing a Muslim college, which Muslim children could be educated in both religious and secular subjects in simultaneously. Mainly he concerns the status of women and women education in India, during the early 19th century. the status of women in India was the worst. The educational framework of our country was in shambles. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan despite being a moderate took great exception to the Britishers' feudal structure in the educational system in the country; he not only expounded the theory of democratizing education but also made relentless efforts towards achieving parity with Europe in terms of education.

The literacy rate of the nineteenth century in India ranged from anywhere between 3 to 7 per cent, female literacy is estimated by various sources to be less than one per cent. In 1853 the Gross Enrolment Ratio in India (cutting across religion) was 0.014 per cent, the average literacy rate for Hindus was 8.4 per cent and that for Muslims was 6.4 per cent.ⁱⁱⁱ

Perhaps, it will not be an exaggeration to say that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a first among equals in terms of his zeal and dedication towards revolutionising the way Indians were educated. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was farsighted enough to link the economic critique of colonialism with India's dilapidated educational status, he remarked even before Ranade, Naoroji, and others that ignorance and lack of education was the major reason why Indians were poor despite India being rich in various natural resources.

'Mahatma Gandhi said that 'sir Sayed Ahmed khan was the profit of education in India'. The long trail of Sir Syed's work in the field of education can best be judged by the number of secular and scientific institutions that he founded. The fact that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a great votary of women's right to education was evident from his views on Muslim personal law, he greatly differed from other Muslim scholars on questions of divorce and women

rights, and he also condemned domestic violence against women in the strongest words.

In 1864, he founded the Translation Society which was later renamed '*The Scientific Society*'. It inculcates scientific temper among the youth, particularly Muslim youth since it was perceived that they had lagged behind in modern scientific pursuits which were considered western and anti-religion in most parts of northern India. The society was located at Aligarh. It published Urdu translations of English books on science and other subjects, and an English-Urdu journal for spreading liberal ideas on social reforms. He advocated the removal of many social prejudices that kept the community backward.

His greatest achievement was the establishment of the '*Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College (Also known as Aligarh Muslim University) at Aligarh in 1875*'. While doing so he made conscious efforts to model the institutions on the line of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, this attempt at breaking the glass ceiling and dispelling the myth of western supremacy was widely lauded as well as criticised but what is worth noting is the fact that he had set out on a mission to instil a spirit of inquiry in ordinary Indians, men, and women alike.

In course of time, this college became the most important educational institution of Indian Muslims. It provided for education in humanities and science throughout English medium and many of its staff members came from England. The college received support from leading Muslims throughout India and the British showed much interest, both officially and otherwise in its development.

The movement of Muslim awakening associated with Syed Ahmad Khan and M.A.O. College came to be known as *Aligarh Movement*. He opposed the activities of the Indian national congress. He believed, like many other leaders at that time that Indians were not yet ready to govern themselves and that their interests would be best served by remaining loyal to the British rule. He

founded the Indian patriotic Association with the support of some Hindu and Muslim leaders to oppose the congress and tried to dissuade the Muslims from joining the congress. He emphasized the unity between Hindus and Muslims.

The fact that a girl's school was established in Aligarh just a decade after his death lays testimony to the timelessness of his ideas. The founders of the girls' school cited Sir Syed Ahmad as the inspiration behind it and hence gave strength and endurance to his views towards women's education throughout the country. It won't be an exaggeration to state that the Aligarh Muslim University is a great symbol of Sir Syed Ahmad's vision and efforts towards the education of women in India.

Conclusion

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was one of the greatest Muslim reformers of India. He was the man of great sacrifice; he devoted his life for the empowerment and upliftment of Muslim community. He interpreted Quran in the light of modern rationalism and science. He took up the struggle against fanaticism, ignorance, narrow mindedness and bigotry and laid emphasis on free thinking. His education reforms addressed the problem of the illiteracy of the Muslims. It creating in them a sense of national pride and identity. His greatest achievement was the establishment of the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875. The contribution of Sayed Ahmed khan is so wide that history of the world and modern Indian will always remember him in the brightest and golden pages.

ⁱWritings and speeches of sir Sayed Ahmed khan, pp. 32-33

ⁱⁱ Aligarh institute gazette. July 10, 1874, p 25.

ⁱⁱⁱLife and work of Sayed Ahmed khan, p 98