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LANDMARKS OF THE PAKISTAN MOVEMENT

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duly diagnosed that: 'It is Mr. Gandhi who is destroying the ideal with which the Congress started. He is the one man responsible for turning Congress into an instrument for the revival of Hinduism. His ideal is to revive the Hindu religion and establish Hindu raj in this country and he is utilizing the Congress to further this object'.¹⁰ It is no wonder that the pursuit of Gandhian objectives by the Congress party made it impossible for the Muslims to bridge their differences with the Hindus.

After the taste of Hindu rule (1937-1939) it became amply clear to the Muslims that an independent Muslim homeland was the only way in which they could escape the tyranny of a permanent all-India Hindu majority. But even a worthy cause can be defeated if the forces opposed to it are too strong.

Luckily for the Muslims, the humiliating experience of Hindu rule finally caused even Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah to despair of Hindu-Muslim unity. Hitherto, he had devoted all his energy toward the achievement of a united independent India. He now diverted it toward the achievement of Pakistan. Without him there would never have been a Pakistan because he was the only Muslim leader who could outmanoeuvre leaders of the calibre of Gandhi, Nehru and Mountbatten who were all bitterly opposed to the creation of Pakistan. By his charismatic leadership he had, moreover, rallied the Muslim masses passionately behind him. It was realized by his opponents that the denial of Pakistan would cause the explosive situation to blow up and make a constitutionally viable transfer of power impossible.

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¹⁰ Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, Ed., *Foundations of Pakistan, II*, p. 305. The Quaid made this statement on 26 December 1938 during his presidential address to the Patna session of the Muslim League.

LANDMARK 1

THE INDIAN COUNCILS ACT OF 1909

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

The Plight of the Muslims after the Rebellion of 1857

The period immediately following the collapse of the Great Rebellion of 1857 was one of great humiliation and misery for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

A British Military Commission pronounced the Mogul Emperor Bahadur Shah guilty of 'rebellion' against the British Government. At the trial he was described at one and the same time the 'Ex-king of Delhi' and 'a subject of the British Government of India'. The reality that constitutionally he was an independent king, though his sovereignty physically was limited to the palace-fortress of Delhi and its precincts, was ignored. So were the facts that he was eighty-two years of age, was clearly infirm of both body and mind and was a mere pawn in the hands of the rebel sepoys. He was banished to Rangoon. The imperial capital was devastated. 'After the siege [of Delhi by the British] was over', reported Lord Elphinstone, 'the outrages committed by our army are simply

heart-rending. A wholesale vengeance is being taken without distinction of friend or foe. As regards looting, we surpassed Nadir Shah'.¹

The British authorities held the Muslims chiefly responsible for the Rebellion and the Hindus, who had readily taken to Western education, occupied the bulk of the administrative posts available to Indians. Economically, too the Muslims were in a miserable state. As the ruling class they had, in their heyday, preferred to occupy government positions and had left trade and commerce mostly in Hindu hands.

In the field of education the Muslims were shocked when their British rulers decreed in 1837 that English would replace Persian as the court language. The ulema believed that this was a step toward weaning the Muslims from their own religion and culture and converting them to Christianity. They tried to prevent their flock from learning English and castigated the few Muslims who had dared to learn the language of their Christian rulers as *kafirs*. Indeed, western education on secular lines ran counter to the Muslim tradition of educating children either at home or in *madrassas* where religious education was a compulsory part of the curriculum. Recalling the attitude of the Muslim community toward English education during the early phase of British rule, Sir Syed Ahmed said:

[The Muslims] could never be brought to admit that sound and useful learning existed in any language except Arabic and Persian... I still remember the days when, in respectable families, the study of English, with the object of obtaining a post in Government service or of securing any other lucrative employment, was considered highly discreditable.²

¹ *Rebellion 1857. A Symposium*. Delhi, 1957, p. 163

² G. F. I. Graham. *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, MDCCCLXXXV.

The situation so worried the British authorities that Lord Mayo, the Governor-General, openly mooted the question: 'Are the Indian Musalmans bound by their Religion to rebel against the Queen?' A senior member of the Bengal Civil Service, W. W. [afterwards Sir William] Hunter, responded with an *apologia* under the title *The Indian Musalmans*.³

Hunter pointed out that before the coming of the British, the Muslim aristocracy 'were conquerors and claimed as such the monopoly of Government. Occasionally a Hindu financier, and more seldom a Hindu general, came to the surface, but the conspicuousness of such instance is the best proof of their rarity'. He went on to explain, that the 'three streams of wealth' which used to run 'perennially into the coffers of a noble Musalman House-Military command, the Collection of the Revenue, and judicial or Political Employ' had all dried up.⁴

Again:

A hundred years ago, the Musalmans monopolised all the important offices of State. The Hindus accepted with thanks such crumbs as their former conquerors dropped from their table, and the English were represented by a few factors and clerks. The proportion of Muhammadans to Hindus, as shown above, is now less than one-seventh. The proportion of Hindus to Europeans is more than one-half; the proportion of Musalmans to Europeans is less than one-fourteenth. The proportion of the race which a century ago had the monopoly of Government, has now fallen to less than one-twenty-third of the whole administrative body. This, too, in the gazetted appointments, where the

³ *India, 1969* (Reprinted from the third edition. The book was first published in 1871).

⁴ Hunter, pp. 150-151.

distribution of patronage is closely watched. In the less conspicuous office establishments in the Presidency Town, the exclusion of Musalmans is even more complete. In one extensive Department the other day it was discovered that there was not a single employee who could read the Musalman dialect; and, in fact, there is now scarcely a Government office in Calcutta in which a Muhammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of ink-pots and menders of pens.⁵

In discussing the question, whether the Muslims were bound by their religion to rebel against the Queen, Hunter referred to the Wahabi camp that had been established on the Frontier by Saiyid Ahmad Barelvi in 1824. He stated that originally its purpose was to wage war against the Sikhs but on the annexation of the Punjab by the British, the Wahabi 'fury' had been 'transferred to their successors'.⁶ The Wahabis proclaimed that the occupation of India by the British had turned it into 'a Country of the Enemy' making it obligatory for them to wage war against the new rulers.⁷ He said no one could predict what would happen if the Wahabis and 'the seditious masses in the heart of our Empire, and the superstitious tribes on our Frontier' combined together to wage a 'Crescentage'.⁸

He called the Muslims 'a persistently belligerent class' whom successive governments had 'declared to be a source of permanent danger to the Indian Empire'.⁹ He said that the Wahabis, 'deduce from the fact of India being technically, a Country of the Enemy, the obligation to wage war upon its rulers. The more enlightened Musalmans, while

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁹ Dedication.

sorrowfully accepting the fact, regard it as not ground of rebellion, but as a curtailment of their spiritual privileges'. He concluded that 'a cold acquiescence in our rule... is the utmost that the intolerant spirit of Islam will permit to a really sincere disciple'.¹⁰

He pointed out that the Muslims had held aloof from the British system in which the 'more flexible Hindus' and 'cheerfully acquiesced'.¹¹ The Muslims arraigned the British Government 'for its want of sympathy, for its want of magnanimity, for its mean malversation of their funds, and for great public wrongs spread over a period of one hundred years'.¹²

Sir Syed's Family Background and Early Life

To reconcile the Muslims of India with their angry foreign rulers, to inspire them with hope and to give them a new sense of direction was a herculean task and called for a leader of heroic proportions. They were lucky at this dark hour of their history to find just such a man to uplift them – Syed (afterwards Sir Syed) Ahmed Khan.

Syed Ahmed was born on 17 October 1817 in an aristocratic family of Delhi who had migrated to India from Herat some generations ago. From his immediate ancestors he inherited a mixture of attributes which fitted him admirably for the task he was destined to undertake. His father was deeply religious and utterly unconcerned with worldly rewards while both his grandfathers were distinguished men of the world.

His paternal grandfather was a titled courtier and Commander of 1000 foot and 300 horsemen in the reign of Alamgir II. Upon his death his titles were offered to Syed Ahmed's father, Syed Muhammad Takki but he modestly declined the honour.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 136.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Syed Ahmed's maternal grandfather, Khwaja Fariduddin Ahmed, was an attache in the embassy sent to Persia by Lord Wellesley as governor-general in 1799. On his return he was appointed Political Officer at the Court of Ava in Burma and served as such for some years. Soon after the return of the Khwaja to Calcutta, Syed Ahmed's father was offered the post of prime minister by Akbar II but he declined the honour and suggested that his kinsman, Khwaja Fariduddin Ahmed, was the best person for the post. Thereupon the king made the Khwaja prime minister and conferred a high title on him.

Syed Ahmed's father was an intimate friend of the Mogul emperor and the only person permitted to sit in his presence. In his younger years, Syed Ahmed was constantly seen in the palace and was often honoured by the emperor with robes of honour.

On his father's death in 1836, the nineteen year old Syed Ahmed was invested by the Emperor Bahadur Shah not only with the titles of his grandfather but also with the additional title of Arif Jang or Master of War.

Because of the otherworldly life-style of his father, Syed Ahmed passed most of his childhood under the care of his maternal grandfather. Like many other great men, he had the good fortune to have been brought up by a mother of lofty character. 'She was', in his own words, 'highminded, virtuous, gracious-mannered, wise, farsighted, and seraphic'.¹³ And it was she who educated him at home. He learnt no English formally but seems to have acquired a smattering of that language as the years passed.¹⁴

Syed Ahmed's father died in 1836 and in January of the following year, much against the wishes of his family, he entered government service as Shiristehdar of the Criminal

¹³ M. Hadi Husain, *Syed Ahmed Khan*, Lahore, 1970, p. 5.

¹⁴ This is clear from one of his letters from England during his visit there (1869-1870). Describing the occasion at which he received the insignia of the Companion of the Star of India, he stated that one of the persons to whom he had been introduced was the Marquis of Lorne who 'conversed with me very kindly for some minutes... He spoke in English, of course, and I answered him as well as I could in that language'. Graham, p. 100.

Department in the office of the Sadr Amin at Delhi. In February of the following year he was transferred to Agra as Naib Munshi in the office of the Commissioner. He became Sub-judge of Fatehpur Sikri in December 1841 and in January 1846 was transferred to Delhi. In 1850 he was posted to Rohtak and in 1855 to Bijnor and was there when the Great Rebellion broke out in 1857.

Government service did not inhibit his penchant for learning and writing and he had already produced several works on historical and religious subjects. The chief of these were *Asar-us-Sanadid*, an archaeological history of the ruins of Delhi, and a revision of Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*. Both these were substantial efforts involving considerable research. He also produced several pamphlets on miscellaneous subjects. His history of the ruins of Delhi was translated into both English and French and earned him the Fellowship of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Entry into Politics

It was after the failure of the Great Rebellion that Syed Ahmed entered politics for the express purpose of rehabilitating his downcast community. The outline of his programme as it evolved over the years was to eradicate the antagonism between the Muslims and the British; to modernize the outlook of the Muslims chiefly through the Western system of education so that they could compete on equal terms with the Hindus; and to oppose such demands of the Indian National Congress Party as would enable the Hindus to dominate the Muslims by virtue of their numbers and literary proficiency. His chief concern for his people, as he explained in one of his public speeches, was 'not...to become subjects of the Hindus instead of the subjects of the "people of the Book [Christians]".'¹⁵

The vigorous prosecution of his mission necessitated frank criticism of British policies as well as of the attitudes

¹⁵ Hafeez Malik, *Political Profile of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, A Documentary Record*, Islamabad, 1982, p. 371.

and prejudices of the Muslim community. On the whole he found it easier to win the appreciation and cooperation of British officials than of his own people who were the main beneficiaries of his endeavours. Of course, in his relationship with the British, he started with a great advantage. He had already convinced them of his loyalty to them and won their admiration, their respect, and their gratitude for having saved the lives of the British community at Bijnor during the Rebellion at the peril of his own life.

At the time of the Great Rebellion the European community in Bijnor comprised twenty men, women and children including the Collector, Alexander Shakespeare. The moment of the greatest danger to their lives arrived when the house in which they had all taken shelter was surrounded by Mahmud Khan and his eight hundred strong rebel force. Mahmud Khan was a desperate character being the nephew of the Rohilla chief Ghulam Qadir who had gouged out the eyes of the Mogul Emperor Shah Alam. Syed Ahmed who had been helping the Europeans all along, volunteered to parley with Mahmud Khan and boldly went to his camp unarmed. After protracted negotiations, he succeeded in persuading the Rohilla chief to spare the lives of the Europeans.

The main argument he employed was that to massacre the Europeans might prove to be 'dangerous' for him in the long run in case the British eventually emerged victorious in the struggle. The European party left peacefully in the dead of night.

In a speech in 1880 the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces recalled Syed Ahmed's action in these words: 'No man ever gave nobler proofs of conspicuous courage and loyalty to the British Government than were given by him in 1857; no language that I could use would be worthy of the devotion he showed'.¹⁶

After the Great Rebellion was over, he showed equal courage in laying the main blame for the conflagration squarely on the shoulders of the foreign rulers, not on the

¹⁶ Graham, p. 19.

insurgents. His pamphlet *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* was published in Urdu in 1858; it was translated into English in 1873. In the preface Syed Ahmed said, 'An honest exposition of native ideas is all that our Government requires to enable it to hold the country, with the full concurrence of its inhabitants, and not merely by the sword'.¹⁷

The main points he made in the body of the essay were:

...for a long period many grievances had been rankling in the hearts of the people...it wanted but the application of a match to light it, and that match was applied by the mutinous army. The manner in which the rebellion spread first here then there...is alone good proof that there existed no widespread conspiracy... The evils which resulted to India from the non-admission of the natives into the Legislative Council of India were various. Government could never know the inadvisability of the laws and regulations which it passed... But the greatest mischief lay in this, that the people misunderstood the views and intentions of Government... At length the Hindustanees fell into the habit of thinking that all the laws were passed with a view to degrade and ruin them, and to deprive them and their fellows of their religion... Then missionary schools were started in which the principles of the Christian faith were taught. Men said it was by the order of Government... The laws providing for the resumption of revenue free lands... were most obnoxious... It is a remarkable fact that whenever the rebels have issued proclamations... they have only mentioned two things: the one, interference in matters of religion; the other, the resumption of revenue

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

free lands... There was no real communication between the governors and the governed...the natives very generally say that they are treated with contempt...The opinion of many of...[the]...officials is that no native can be a gentleman...¹⁸

It is notable that from the very beginning of his political life, Syed Ahmed thought of Hindus and Muslims as 'two antagonistic races'. In the pamphlet under review he referred to them as such and criticised the Government for grouping them in the same regiment. This he argued had developed a feeling of friendship and brotherhood between them with the result that they combined in the rebellion against the British.¹⁹

Syed Ahmed's conviction, that the basic cause of the Great Rebellion was lack of proper communication between the rulers and the ruled, had an interesting and far-reaching consequence. A.O. Hume, who founded the Indian National Congress, told Aftab Ahmad Khan in London in 1892 that it was Syed Ahmed's book on the *Causes of the Indian Revolt* that had caused him to feel the need for a forum of public opinion in India and led him to establish the Indian National Congress.²⁰

When Syed Ahmed's *Causes of the Indian Revolt* was discussed in the Governor-General's Council, Cecil Beadon, the Foreign Secretary, labelled it as 'highly seditious' and proposed that the author be brought to book for it. The Governor-General and other members of the Council, however, overruled him and no action was taken.

Having ruffled British feathers by squarely blaming their policies for the Great Rebellion, Syed Ahmed proceeded to assure them of the loyalty of Muslims. In a pamphlet in

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁰ S. M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, Lahore 1977, p. 26. Aftab Ahmad Khan later became a member of the Council of the Secretary of State for India.

1860 under the title *The Loyal Mohammedans of India*, he argued that the Muslims as a class were far from being their enemies; in fact they were their only natural friends in the country. The special bond between the Christians and the Muslims was that they each have a revealed holy book.

He conceded that some 'unworthy' Muslims had sided with the rebels but deprecated the 'wholesale denunciation against Mohammedans as a race'. It is easy 'to make empty professions of loyalty and service' he said. In fact no class other than Muslims 'so willingly sacrificed reputation, status, life and property' in the interests of the Government. He backed up his assertions with sixteen concrete instances of prominent Muslims whose services in the Rebellion had been publicly acknowledged and rewarded by the British Government.²¹

He feared that if the Muslims joined others in any agitation against the government they would again end up carrying most of the blame. He therefore cautioned his people against making such a mistake. He naturally realized that, as the more backward community, the Muslims required the goodwill and support of the British Government to compete with the Hindus with any chance of success.

Syed Ahmed also wrote a Commentary on the Bible to show that Islam and Christianity had a fundamental affinity between them. He tackled the task with his characteristic thoroughness: he learnt Hebrew, set up a press having English, Hebrew and Urdu types and engaged an Englishman to translate the Commentary from Urdu into English. He published three volumes but had to give up the task because of its high cost.

'Educate, Educate, Educate'

Syed Ahmed believed that the most effective means of reviving the fortune of his people was to educate them. He adopted as his motto the slogan 'Educate, educate, educate'. And argued that:

²¹ Extracts from the pamphlet will be found in Graham, pp. 58-69.

If the condition of Mahomedans be mean and miserable, then I think Islam herself will be degraded... each time has its own colour, and unless you adapt yourselves to the circumstances of the time your work cannot prosper... I believe that without high education it is impossible now to acquire honour... My desire is not only to spread education among Mahomedans, but to spread two other things. The first of these is training in character... The second thing I wish to see established in our people is national feeling and sympathy; and this cannot be created unless boys of our nation read together...the reason why our Prophet ordered all the dwellers in one neighbourhood to meet five times a day for prayers in the mosque, and why the whole had to meet together on Fridays in the city mosque and in Eid all the people of the district had to assemble. The reason was that the effect of the gathering should influence all, and create a national feeling...²²

In his view the English possessed all the 'good qualities, spiritual or material, which a human being should possess' because both their men and women were educated. If the people of India could also be educated, 'then by virtue of their natural advantages, she could become, if not superior to England, at least its equal'.²³

He explained why the Muslims needed their own schools and colleges. The system of education under which students lived in mosques and monasteries was not suitable for acquiring 'the learning which is current in our time'. And

²² Hafeez Malik, *Political Profile of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, pp. 381-384.

²³ M. Hadi Husain, p. 68.

government colleges do not impart religious education which Muslims consider necessary for their children.²⁴

Syed Ahmed chided fellow Muslims for their prejudice that Western literature was heretical and would shake their faith. He regretted that they believed, that their religion, which in fact was so great and enlightened, was weak enough to be endangered by the study of Western literature and science.²⁵

He thought the English language was important because the largest number of books on modern subjects could be found in that language and also because India was governed by the British. He rejected the idea that English, which was spoken by many countries of the world, interfered with the religion of the Muslims. He emphasised that his advocacy of English did not imply that Arabic should be neglected. In fact 'the Arabic language ranks first in the languages of the world and the Almighty made it His Mouthpiece to mankind' and it was the parent's 'first, the most sacred duty' to teach Arabic to their children.²⁶

But since English could not become the common language of the people 'until centuries have entered through the portals of Past' the best course was to translate English books on modern philosophy, arts and sciences into the languages of India so that the knowledge contained in them does not remain available only to those who know English.²⁷

At a later stage, Syed Ahmed confessed that he had been wrong in thinking that the knowledge of Western arts and sciences should be diffused in India through vernacular translations and approved Lord William Bentincks declaration that 'the great object of the Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the nations of India'.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

²⁵ Shan Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, p. 62.

²⁶ Hafeez Malik, pp. 333-334.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

²⁸ Graham, pp. 315-316.

His first practical step in the field of education was the foundation of a school at Moradabad in 1858. He started the Translation Society at Shazipur in 1864. On his transfer to Aligarh the office of the Society was moved to that city under the new name of the Scientific Society. The Society's activities were later extended to include the publication of the *Scientific Society Magazine*; it eventually developed into the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*.

In May 1866 he founded the British India Association for the purpose of bringing Indian affairs before the British Parliament more prominently. 'Can you expect its [Parliament's] members, gentlemen, to take a deep interest in your affairs, if you do not lay your affairs before them?', he asked in his address at the inaugural meeting.²⁹

Six months later Syed Ahmed was presented with a gold medal and a copy of Macaulay's works by the Viceroy, Lord Lawrence. The inscription on the medal read: '...in recognition of his continuous and successful efforts to spread the light of literature and science among his countrymen.'³⁰

Hindus and Muslims are Two Irreconcilable Nations

Hitherto, Syed Ahmed had worked with Hindus cordially in his educational activities. In 1867, while he was posted at Benares, a change came over his attitude toward the other community. The poet Altaf Husain Hali who greatly admired Syed Ahmed and worked closely with him gives the following account of this far-reaching development:

'In 1867 some leading Hindus of Benares decided to try to get the use of Urdu in Persian script discontinued in all the law courts and to have the use of Hindi in Devanagri script substituted for it.

Sir Syed would say that this was the first occasion when he felt convinced that

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

henceforth it would be impossible for the Hindus and the Muslims to cooperate as one nation and for anyone to serve them both simultaneously. His actual words were, "While the controversy was rampant in Benares, I was discussing the problem of Muslim education one day with Mr. Shakespeare who was then Commissioner of Benares. He listened to me for some time with an expression of surprise on his face and then said, 'This is the first time that I have heard you talk exclusively about the education of Muslims. Previously, you invariably expressed equal concern for the welfare of all the people of India'. I explained. Now I feel sure that these two nations will never be able to cooperate sincerely in any undertaking. At this time differences and enmity between them are small but, thanks to the so-called educated classes, these feelings will progressively get worse as time passes".³¹

Visit to England

Though Syed Ahmed by now was over fifty years of age, his restless spirit urged him to take on even weightier projects in the service of his people. He decided to visit England for the dual purpose of finding out how to set up a college in his own country on the lines of colleges in Oxford and Cambridge and for doing research for a response to the *Life of Mohammed* by Sir William Muir, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces, who had depicted Islam as a religion of the sword.

Syed Ahmed's son, Syed Mahmud, had been awarded a government scholarship to enable him to study in England. In order to accompany his son, Syed Ahmed applied for

³¹ Altaf Husain Hali, *Hayat-i-Jaweed*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 138. Translated from Urdu by the author.

eighteen months leave with full pay from his post as Sub-judge and also requested that the period of absence should count for pension. He was granted leave but his requests relating to pay and pension were turned down on the ground that he was not entitled to these, being a member of an uncovenanted service. However, his enthusiasm for the project was so great that he sold and mortgaged his property to finance the trip. Even the sum thus raised was not sufficient for the purpose and he faced the prospect of impoverishment on return.

On 10 April 1869 Syed Ahmed, accompanied by his sons Syed Mahmud and Syed Hamed, sailed from Bombay arriving in London on 4 May. He left England on 4 September 1870 reaching Bombay on 2 October.

During his stay in England he was received in the highest circles and was presented with the Insignia of the Companion of the Star of India by the Secretary of State for India, the Duke of Argyll. He also successfully petitioned the Secretary of State for a revision of the order denying him pay and pension rights for the period of leave.

Though handicapped by lack of financial support, he spared no effort in preparing a reply to Muir's book. 'Muslims', he complained in one of his letters to India, 'will pull up their sleeves to fight anybody to eat with Englishmen, but if you ask them to spend some money in support of their religion, they will run away from you'.³²

He produced a *Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammed and Subjects Subsidiary thereto*. They were translated into English by a friend and published in 1870.

He cited verses from the Quran prohibiting the use of force in religion. Altogether, his essays showed an 'extraordinary depth of learning, great toleration of other religions, [and] great veneration for the essential principles of true Christianity'.³³ Muir himself said of them 'This is not the

³² M. Hadi Husain, p. 71.

³³ Graham, p. 106.

Islam I object to, but that believed in by Muslims all over the world'.³⁴

Commenting on Syed Ahmed's extraordinary zeal in the service of Islam M. Mujeeb writes: 'He was beyond doubt a very sensitive and sincere Muslim, and went all the way to England to search in the India Office Library and the British Museum for source material that would enable him to refute the charges made against the Prophet by Sir William Muir. This was something inconceivable in his time, and later generations of Muslims have not produced anyone as keenly and desperately anxious to maintain the honour of Islam in the world of scholarship'.³⁵

Review of Hunter's The Indian Mussalmans

In 1872 Syed Ahmed once again took up his pen to join issue with a high ranking British official. We have already discussed Hunter's *The Indian Mussalmans* published in 1871 and noted that he branded the entire Muslim community of India as being potentially dangerous to British rule. It is not surprising that Syed Ahmed should have taken exception to this sweeping charge. But in his review of Hunter's book he had to bear in mind that Hunter had also conceded that the British Government was not free from blame. 'No young man', he had written, 'whether Hindu or Muhammadan, passes through our Anglo-Indian schools without learning to disbelieve the faith of his fathers'. And he had claimed that the object of writing his book was 'to enquire into the grievances of the Muhammadans under English rule; to point out their real wrongs and the means of remedying them'.³⁶

Syed Ahmed did not question Hunter's motive nor his facts and figures illustrating the sad condition of the Muslims of Bengal where the Hindus had left the Muslims far behind in the fields of Western education and material progress. But he took exception to his magnifying the threat to British India

³⁴ M. Hadi Husain, p. 81.

³⁵ M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, p. 448. Mujeeb was Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi for twenty-five years.

³⁶ Hunter, pp. 136, 3.

from the Wahabi camp on the frontier and his view that the entire Muslim community in India was potentially rebellious.

Syed Ahmed argued that '...as long as Mussalmans can preach the unity of God in perfect peace, no Mussalman can, according to his religion, wage war against the rulers of that country, of whatever creed they be... Now we Mohammedans of India live in this country with every sort of religious liberty; we discharge the duties of our faith with perfect freedom; we read our *azans* as loud as we wish; we can preach our faith on the public roads and thoroughfares as freely as Christian missionaries preach theirs; we fearlessly write and publish our answers to the charges laid against Islam by the Christian clergy, and even publish works against the Christian faith; and last, though not least, we make converts of Christians to Islam without fear or prohibition.'³⁷

Efforts to Modernize the Muslim Community

It was not sufficient for Syed Ahmed just to defend his fellow Muslims against prejudices of powerful foreigners. It was also essential to rid his own people of concepts which were holding back their progress.

No sooner had he returned home from England than he took steps to start a magazine and to found a college. The first issue of *Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq* came out on 24 December 1870 and Syed Ahmed editorially stated that 'The purpose behind the publication of this paper is to induce Muslims to adopt a high degree of civilization so that they no longer incur the contempt of civilized peoples, but, on the contrary, take their place among the respected and civilized nations of the world'.

Syed Ahmed was throughout the Magazine's managing editor and its most regular contributor. He was able to enlist the cooperation of leading scholars of Urdu such as Altaf Husain Hali, Nazir Ahmed, Zakauallah, Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk and Chiragh Ali. The aim of Syed Ahmed and his collaborators was to get their message through, not to impress the reader with literary flourishes.

³⁷ Graham, p. 238

They ushered in a new style of Urdu prose – simple and direct, free from the burden of artificial embellishment.

Besides bringing out *Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq*, Syed Ahmed formed 'A Committee for the better diffusion and advancement of learning among the Mohammedans of India'. So intense was his commitment to the project that he could not sleep during the night preceding the inaugural meeting of the Committee. A friend who shared the room with him related that he and Syed Ahmed had talked till midnight about the education of the Muslims after which he went to sleep, 'Waking up suddenly at about two o'clock in the morning I found Syed Ahmed missing from his bed. So I went out of the room to look for him. Imagine my surprise at finding him walking up and down in the verandah and crying as if his heart would break'. When the friend asked him whether he had received sad news from somewhere, Syed Ahmed replied, crying even more profusely, 'No sad news but what could be sadder than to think of the Muslims' condition? It is getting worse every day, and I see no prospect of its ever improving'. He added that he had no hope of any good coming out of the forthcoming meeting and had been worrying about it all night.'³⁸

In the event, Syed Ahmed's fears proved groundless. The Committee elected Syed Ahmed as its secretary and got down to business seriously. The endeavours of the Committee were directed to the investigation of causes which prevented the Muslims from availing themselves adequately from government educational institutions, and to providing means by which they might be reconciled to the study of Western arts and sciences.

On 15 April 1872, the Committee transformed itself into 'The Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College Fund Committee' for the purpose of raising funds for a college to be run on the lines of English colleges. To start with, a school was opened at Aligarh on 1 June 1875 with eleven students.

³⁸ Hadi Husain, p. 114.

In 1876, Syed Ahmed retired from government service and took up residence at Aligarh to devote his time and energy wholly toward the betterment of Muslims. He went to extraordinary lengths to raise funds for the college. If friends wished to give a party in his honour, he would ask for cash for the college instead; to celebrate the marriage of his son, Syed Mahmud, he contributed five hundred rupees to the college fund instead of giving a *valima* feast; and he did the same in celebration of his grandson's *bismillah* ceremony. 'We even risked punishment on the Day of Judgement', he said for having raised twenty thousand rupees by organizing a lottery, which is a form of gambling.

Before long he had collected sufficient resources for the school to be raised to a college. The opening ceremony of the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College (M.A.O.) was performed on 8 January 1877 by no less a person than Lord Lytton, the Viceroy. In the course of its report on the ceremony, *The Pioneer* commented:

It has long been recognised that a spirit of enlightened advancement has of late begun to make itself felt among the higher class of Mohammedans in India, and the untiring energy of Syed Ahmed Khan, Bahadoor, certainly one of the most remarkable men of his race, has brought about results on which a few years ago would have seemed impossible.³⁹

The address to the Viceroy was read by Syed Mahmud. In it he defined the objects of the college in these words: 'To dispel those illusory traditions of the past which have hindered our progress; to remove those prejudices which have hitherto exercised a baneful influence on our race; to reconcile oriental learning with Western literature and

³⁹ For a full report of the opening ceremony of the M.A.O. College see Graham, pp. 262-222

science; to inspire in the dreamy minds of the people of the East the practical energy which belongs to those of the West; to make the Mussulmans of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown; to inspire in them that loyalty which springs, not from servile submission to a foreign rule, but from genuine appreciation of the blessings of good government'.

The M.A.O. College proved to be Syed Ahmed's most substantial and biding monument. For the first time Muslims of good families from distant parts of India lived and studied together under the same roof and cultivated a spirit of comradeship. The college at Aligarh attained the status of University in 1920. 'Alig' attained the same status in India as 'Oxon' or 'Cantab' in England.

In 1876 Syed Ahmed started work on a massive Commentary on the Koran and worked on it as hard as his other responsibilities would permit. He could not complete the task in his life-time but managed to finish seven volumes. His main aims were to show that there was a fundamental similarity between Islam and Christianity, and that there was no contradiction between the Koran and modern sciences. He pointed out also that social relations such as inter-dining between Muslims and Christians was not forbidden. His writings helped toward freeing the mind of Muslims from narrow-mindedness and prejudices and fostering better personal and official relations between the Muslims and the British.

The British System of Election Pure and Simple is not Suitable for India

In 1878 Lord Lytton nominated Syed Ahmed as a member of the Viceroy's Council. After two years he was appointed for a second term of the same duration by Lord Ripon. Syed Ahmed's political philosophy started the trend which ultimately convinced the Muslims that they and the Hindus constituted two irreconcilable nations.

His first weighty political speech was made in the Imperial Council on 15 January 1883 on Lord Ripon's Local Self-Government Bill. That measure established Municipal Councils and Rural District Boards whose members – in some cases a majority of them – were directly elected but it reserved to Government the right to nominate one-third of the members.

It is important to note that Syed Ahmed supported the first step toward self-government that the Bill represented and also highly approved the representative institutions which had made England 'great among the nations of the world'. In fact, 'the principle of self-government by means of representative institutions is perhaps the greatest and noblest lesson which the beneficence of England will teach India'. But he asserted that:

...no part of India has yet arrived at the stage when the system of representation can be adopted, in its fullest scope, even in regard to local affairs...in borrowing from England the system of representative institutions, it is of the greatest importance to remember those socio-political matters in which India is distinguishable from England... India, a continent in itself, is inhabited by vast populations of different races and different creeds; the rigour of religious institutions has kept even neighbours apart; the system of caste is still dominant and powerful. In one and the same district the population may consist of various creeds and various nationalities... The system of representation means the representation of the views and interest of the majority of the population... So long as differences of race and creed and the distinction of caste form an important element in the socio-political life of India, and influence her inhabitants in matters connected with the

administration and welfare of the country at large, the system of election, pure and simple, cannot be safely adopted. The larger community would totally override the interest of the smaller community.

He welcomed the fact that Government was reserving to itself the power of nominating one-third of the members of the local bodies as it would ensure a just balance in the representation of the various sections 'of the Indian population.'⁴⁰

In a speech at Lucknow on 28 December 1887, Syed Ahmed disclosed that Lord Ripon's Bills originally provided that all the members of the local bodies should be selected by election and that it was only after he had opposed the proposal that Lord Ripon changed his proposal and made one-third of the members appointed and two-thirds elected.⁴¹

In the sphere of education, Syed Ahmed recognized that founding a college at Aligarh was not sufficient. Accordingly in December 1886 he founded the All-India Muhammadan Educational Congress which would meet annually at different places to rouse nation-wide interest in Muslim education. Four years later the name of the organization was changed to Muhammadan Educational Conference to avoid the suggestion of any affinity with the Indian National Congress which had been founded in 1885. The annual sessions of the Conference attracted intellectuals from various parts of the country and created a sense of solidarity between them. It also led to stimulating exchange of ideas for the advancement of the community in different fields including social reforms and politics. The twentieth session of the Conference at Dacca in 1906, after its regular session, reconvened with the addition of other prominent leaders to found the All-India Muslim League which was destined to achieve Pakistan.

⁴⁰ For the text of Syed Ahmed's speech see R. Compton, *The Indian Problem* (1873-1905) London, 1942, p. 154.

⁴¹ 1961: Malik, p. 254.

Opposition to the Indian National Congress

With the birth of the Indian National Congress at Bombay in December 1885, India entered a new political era. At its first session, out of 72 delegates only 2 were Muslims and they both hailed from Bombay itself and were men of ordinary standing. The second session in Calcutta was attended by 435 delegates out of whom 31 were Muslims. Again, none of the Muslims was a notable person. To improve the communal image of their organization, the Congress leaders made special efforts to attract a larger number of Muslim delegates. The overt moves to entice Muslims into its fold, and some of its demands which were likely to injure Muslim interests, provoked Syed Ahmed openly to oppose the Congress.

On 28 December 1887, at the same time as the Congress was in session at Madras, Syed Ahmed addressed a large audience of Muslims at Lucknow.⁴² He criticised the Congress demand that posts in the administrative services be filled by competitive examination. 'Think for a moment', he said, 'what would be the result if all appointments were given by competitive examination. Over all races, not only over Mahomedans but over Rajas of high position and the brave Rajputs who have not forgotten the swords of their ancestors, would be placed as ruler a Bengali who at the sight of a table knife would crawl under his chair'.

He also opposed the Congress demand that a section of the Viceroy's Council be elected by the people. He emphasised that the Hindus would have four times the number of votes as compared to the Muslims and added, 'It would be like a game of dice, in which one man had four dice and the other only one'.

With regard to the Congress demand that the Budget, including the cost of the army, be subjected to popular scrutiny, he said, 'How ridiculous...for those who have never

⁴² For text of Syed Ahmed's Lucknow speech see Hafiz Malik, pp. 342-355.

seen a battlefield, or even the mouth of a cannon, to want to prepare the Budget for the army?'

In reply to the critics of his Lucknow lecture he said, 'There is no person who desires more than I that friendship and union should exist between the two peoples of India... But when my Hindu brothers and Bengali friends devise such a course of action as will bring us loss and heap disgrace on our nation, then indeed we can no longer remain friends... The object of the promoters of the National Congress is that the Government of India should be English in name only, and that the internal rule of the country should be entirely in their hands... Let my Hindu fellow-country-men and Bengali brothers understand that...friendship can last so long only as one does not try to put another in subjection...'⁴³

In another speech at Meerut⁴⁴ in March 1888 he complained that the Hindus were bringing undue pressure on the Muslims to join the Congress 'to give a false impression that the Mahomedans have joined them, this is a most unwarranted interference with our nation'.

As to what would happen if the British left India, he said, 'Is it possible that...two nations - the Mahomedans and the Hindus could sit on the same throne? Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other and thrust it down'. He believed that it was necessary for peace and progress in India that 'the English Government should remain for many years. In fact forever'. He argued that the English being 'people of the Book, our nation cannot expect friendship and affection from any other people'.

In August 1888, Syed Ahmed formed the Indian Patriotic Association consisting not only of Muslims but also of those Hindus who were critical of Congress philosophy. The principal object of the Association was, 'To publish and circulate pamphlets and other papers for information of Members of Parliament, English journals, and the people of Great Britain, in which those misstatements will be pointed

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-358.

⁴⁴ For the text of Syed Ahmed's Meerut Speech see *Ibid.*, pp. 359-373.

out by which the supporters of the Indian National Congress have wrongfully attempted' to convince the English people that all the nations of India and the Indian Chiefs and Rulers agree with the aims and objects of the National Congress.⁴⁵

As a further effort to counter Congress propaganda in the British parliamentary circles, he arranged for a huge petition, signed by about 40,000 Muslims from some 70 different cities and towns, to be submitted to the House of Commons in April 1890. It requested that 'your Honourable House will not introduce the principle of election into the constitution of Indian Councils as requested by the Indian National Congress' and claimed that though the Muslim community in India constituted only one-fifth of the total population, 'through its history, traditions, bravery and intelligence the Indian Mahomedan nation is a factor of great importance in Indian politics'.⁴⁶

His Contribution to the Creation of Pakistan

In December 1894, the indefatigable Syed Ahmed launched the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association of Upper India with the objects:

- (1) To protect the political interests of Mahomedans by representing their views before the English people and the Indian Government.
- (2) To discourage popular political agitation among Mahomedans.
- (3) To lend support to measures calculated to increase the stability of the British Government and the security of the Empire; to strive to preserve peace in India; and to

⁴⁵ For the text of Rules of the Indian Patriotic Association, see Rafiq Zakaria, *Rise of Muslims in Indian Politics*, Bombay, 1970, p. 368.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 378.

encourage sentiments of loyalty in the population.⁴⁷

In 1896, Syed Ahmed prepared a remarkable memorandum on behalf of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association in which he advanced the following principles:

(i) equal representation for the Muslims and the Hindus in the North-Western Provinces Legislative Council because, on account of their past historical role, the political importance of the Muslims was not inferior to that of the Hindus, although the latter constituted a vast majority of the population.

(ii) separate communal electorates, with Muslims voting for Muslims only.

(iii) weightage in representation for the Muslims on the municipal councils, district boards etc.⁴⁸

Though not perceptible at the time, Syed Ahmed's proposals contained the seed of Pakistan. As we shall discuss more fully anon, these proposals formed the blueprint for the demands put forward by the Aga Khan delegation to the Viceroy in 1906 and the achievement of the concessions by the delegation put the Muslims of India on the road to a separate homeland of their own.

His Last Years

Syed Ahmed remained active till the end of his life.

One of his great characteristics is his untiring energy. In addition to great breadth of views on questions of national importance, he possesses a power of work as regards minute

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 381

⁴⁸ Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan*, Vol. 1, p. xxviii.

details which is astonishing. Up at 4 A.M., he writes his newspaper articles, his books and pamphlets – sees visitors, official and private – and conducts the onerous duties of his secretaryship to the College Committees not only by day, but not unfrequently far into the night. With him mental labour of the higher kind tends to long life and sound health. His meals are served in European style, and he is a rigid abstainer from all liquor except Adam's ale. At and after dinner friends drop in. The topics of conversation range from discussions on metaphysics, religion, and politics, to quotations from Persian poets and humorous anecdotes. He is of middle height and of massive build, weighing upwards of nineteen stone. His face is leonine – a rugged witness to his determination and energy. If, however, rather stern and forbidding when at rest, it lights up genially when speaking, reflecting the warmth of heart which he so largely possesses. He has a hearty laugh, and enjoys a joke as much as any man.⁴⁹

Syed Ahmed had not only become the acknowledged leader of his own community but had become the dominant Indian politician of the century. His achievements had been recognized by the British Government by the usual method of conferring a knighthood (K.C.S.I) on him in 1888. Unfortunately, his last days were tragic.

His son, Syed Mahmud, had been appointed a judge of the High Court in the North-Western Provinces but had left the post before the age of retirement and he and his father had been residing together at Aligarh. Syed Mahmud had become an alcoholic and impossible to live with and Sir Syed Ahmed had been compelled to take shelter with a friend.

⁴⁹ Graham, p. 381.

On 24 March 1898, Sir Syed was suddenly taken ill while working on a reply to a pamphlet defaming the Prophet. He passed away on 27 March and was laid to rest in the precincts of the mosque of the M.A.O. College. His life as well as his earnings had been dedicated to the service of others. Even his funeral expenses were defrayed by well-wishers.

Branded as Kafir by the Orthodox Ulama

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's efforts to modernize his community in the educational and religious fields had roused bitter opposition among the orthodox ulama and they had branded him a *kafir*. After these *fatwas* were fulminated against Syed Ahmed by the learned doctors of Mecca, he received numerous anonymous letters, in which the writers said they had sworn on the Koran to take his life. One of them said that "Shere Ali, who assassinated Lord Mayo, was an idiot for doing so, as he could have ensured Paradise for himself by killing Syed Ahmed!" Was my friend moved by all these Mecca ecclesiastical thunders or the threats of unknown writers? Not in the least. He did not even get a policeman to look after him; he did not even give intimation of the possible fate in store for him to the head of the police in the station. He worked quietly on, quite prepared to suffer even a painful death in the execution of his set purpose.⁵⁰

In one instance, he learnt that Moulvi Ali Buksh Khan had gone to Mecca to obtain a *fatwa* against him. He simply shrugged this matter off by writing in his journal that he was gratified that a sinner like him had enabled his opponent to acquire virtue by performing a pilgrimage to Mecca. And he quoted Hafiz:

Behold how blessed is my temple of idols,
That, when destroyed, it becomes the abode
of God.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁵¹ Shan Mohammad, p. 72.

His Religious Toleration

Sir Syed was deeply religious. The progress of Muslims was his life's mission but he never attempted to achieve it at the cost of the Hindus. In June 1897, he wrote that it was not in the interests of his community to join the Congress agitation, but despite their differences in political matters the Hindus and the Muslims should live in peace and amity.⁵²

The falling of Moharram and Ram Lila on the same dates usually was a signal for Hindu-Muslim riots. But when these two events occurred simultaneously in 1887, Sir Syed's exhortations to both the communities prevented any untoward incidents from taking place.

With regard to cow sacrifice by Muslims he said that the maintenance of friendship with the Hindus was more valuable than cow slaughter. Once, on the occasion of Id-uz-Zuha, some students purchased a cow for slaughter. Coming to know of this, Sir Syed hastened to the spot, rescued the cow and had it restored to its owner. He strictly forbade any similar occurrence in the future.⁵³

The M.A.O. College Aligarh was not meant exclusively for Muslims. Hindus had also contributed toward setting it up. In 1887 of the eleven members of the Managing Committee, three were Hindus. In 1880 there were 7 Hindus to 8 Muslims and in 1888, 30 Hindus to 39 Muslims on its rolls.

Sir Syed's desire that Hindus and Muslims should live peacefully and prosper side by side was recognized by the leaders of the Hindu community. During his tour of the Punjab in 1884, The Indian Association of Lahore stated in the course of their address:

Not the least remarkable feature of your public career has been the breadth of your views and your liberal attitude towards

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁵³ *Heli Hayat-i-Jaweed*, pp. 783-784.

sections of the community other than your coreligionists. Your conduct throughout has been stainless of bias or bigotry. The benefits of the noble educational institution you have established at Allygurh are open alike to Hindus as well as Mohammedans. Our unhappy country is so split up with petty religious and sectarian jealousies, and had suffered so much in the past from sectarian and religious dissensions, that the advent of a man of your large-hearted and liberal views is a matter of peculiar congratulation at this time.⁵⁴

His Success in Dispelling British Distrust of the Muslims

By his untiring efforts, Sir Syed also succeeded in dispelling the British fear that the Indian Muslims were potentially dangerous to British rule. Only five years after Hunter's indictment of Muslims, Sir William Muir, in the course of a visit to Aligarh, declared, 'During the whole course of my administration, I have ever found the Mussulmans of Upper India faithful to the Queen'.⁵⁵

It goes to the credit of Sir William Muir as well as of Sir William Hunter that though Sir Syed had broken literary lances with them, they became his good friends and admirers. Muir contributed to the funds for the establishment of Sir Syed's college and during a visit to Aligarh in May 1875, had wished 'my friend Syed Ahmed Khan joy' at the fulfilment of his wish to found a college.⁵⁶

Hunter, as president of the Education Commission, decided to hold the first session of the Commission in the North-Western Provinces in the Aligarh college (August 1882). In the opening part of his speech he explained, 'It is

⁵⁴ Graham, p. 342.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

because this college in which we are now assembled forms the greatest and noblest effort ever made in India for the advancement of Mohammedan education, that the Commission determined to hold its first session for the North-Western Provinces at Allygurh'. And he concluded with the 'hope that centuries after our generation, with its cares and hopes and ambitions, has passed away, the memory of Syed Ahmed will be honoured afresh each year, as the pious founder of the noblest Mohammedan seat of learning which this age has bequeathed to posterity'.⁵⁷

His High Sense of Self-Respect

It would be wrong to assume that Sir Syed was expressing loyalty to the British Government to please officialdom. He was a fearless and highly self-respecting aristocrat. His *Causes of the Indian Revolt* boldly placed the blame for the Rebellion on the policies of the British rulers. And it was written at a time when the British were still seething with anger against the Muslims whom they believed to have been chiefly responsible for the insurrection.

He also did something unheard of in his own time or at any other time in the history of the British rule in India. Though a mere Sub-Judge, he openly contradicted the contents of a book written by Sir William Muir who was the Lieutenant-Governor of the very province in which Sir Syed was serving. He also publicly took issue with William Hunter, another high British official.

Two incidents illustrate how jealously he protected his honour. In the first of these, Sir Syed, though a government servant, abruptly left an official *darbar* in 1867 because the chairs for the Indian invitees had been placed at a level lower than those for the Europeans. The second incident arose from some strictures on government educational policy which Sir Syed had written during his stay in England. The Urdu version of one of Sir William Muir's speeches distinctly accused Sir Syed of a want of veracity. Sir

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 326, 332.

Syed resented the aspersion so deeply that he did not pay the customary call on the Lieutenant-Governor at Allahabad on his way to Benares from England. Sir William caused his private secretary tactfully to write to Sir Syed that the Lieutenant-Governor was glad to hear of his safe return to India and was hoping to hear about his welfare. Sir Syed replied to the private secretary that he had thought that the Lieutenant Governor 'would not care to hear from me, and this for the following reason. In his Honour's speech of 7th February 1870, delivered at the Allygurh School... his Honour, in the Urdu version, accused me of a direct falsehood'. The misunderstanding was patched up when Sir William personally wrote assuring Sir Syed, 'It is hardly necessary for me to say that I should never have dreamed of imputing to you anything approaching to a misstatement of facts'.⁵⁸

Some critics of Sir Syed have alleged that he became hostile to the Indian National Congress under the influence of Theodore Beck, the second principal of the Aligarh College. This criticism is manifestly without foundation. The truth is that Beck was more likely to have come under Sir Syed's spell than vice versa and also that Beck genuinely admired the Muslims more than the Hindus.

Syed Mahmud, son of Sir Syed, had specially gone to England to search for a principal for the Aligarh college to succeed Siddons who was the first one to hold that office. He selected the 24 year old Beck who was still at Cambridge. Beck sailed for India on 1 February 1884.⁵⁹ Not only was he at an impressionable age but he was also entirely new to the bewildering Indian scene. Sir Syed at that time was already a veteran of sixty-six, set in his ways. A year before Beck's arrival, he had already made his famous speech on the Local Self-Government Bill spelling out his opposition to the British system of elections 'pure and simple'; an opposition which was the cornerstone of his political philosophy.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-200.

⁵⁹ Rupert Shephard, *Some Notes on Theodore Beck*, Photo, Eur, 178, p. 8. Shephard was a relative of Beck.

Had Syed Mahmud not felt that Beck was sympathetic to the Muslim cause, he would not have offered him the principalship of the college. Indeed, Beck genuinely 'believed and preached that the future of Mahomedans depended on their allying themselves with the British Government and cutting all links with Hindus... Theodore has been accused and very severely criticised for driving a wedge between Mahomedans and Hindus and certainly he didn't really care for the latter; his letters refer to them in uncomplimentary terms.'⁶⁰

Undoubtedly, Beck enthusiastically helped Sir Syed in his political programme. After all, he was Sir Syed's employee and looked upon him as 'the noblest and most gifted man with whom I have ever enjoyed intimate personal intercourse'.⁶¹

Sir Syed had received no formal education but he made up the deficiency by sheer determination and industry. By his writings and other achievements he did more for the education and enlightenment of the Indian Muslims than any other Muslim leader however learned.

His extreme praise for the British people jars on modern ears. To express himself strongly was a part of his nature but his view that the British were a superior race was shared by Indians of all denominations. The British at that time were at the zenith of their power and glory while the Indians were going through the period of their greatest degradation.

The Indian National Congress which became India's largest political party was founded by a Scotsman, A.O. Hume, after he had retired from the Indian Civil Service. The first words in the history of the Congress were uttered by him when at the inaugural meeting he proposed the name of the president for the session. The closing words too were also his. According to the official report 'Mr. Hume, after acknowledging the honour done him, said that as the giving of cheers had been entrusted to him, he must be allowed to

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶¹ Rafiq Zakaria, p. 318.

propose – on the principle of better late than never – giving of cheers, and that not only three but three times three, and if possible thrice that, for one, the latchet of whose shoes he was unworthy to loose, one to whom they were all dear, to whom they were all as children – need he say. Her Most Gracious Majesty The Queen-Empress'. 'The rest of the speaker's remarks', the report adds, 'were lost in the storm of applause that instantly burst out, and the asked-for cheers were given over and over.'⁶²

Congress also invited some Englishmen to preside over the Congress: Wedderburn (1889); Webb (1894); and Colton (1904).

An Estimate of Sir Syed's Political Stature

That Sir Syed had remarkable foresight became clear quite early in his public career. While the issue of the Great Rebellion was still in the balance, he openly cast his lot with the British at the peril of his own life. Obviously, he could forecast that in the end the British would win. Also, though Hindus and Muslims had just fought shoulder to shoulder against the foreign rulers under the flag of the Mogul Emperor Bahadur Shah, he had the insight to realize (and to state in his *Causes of the Indian Revolt*) that they were in fact the country's 'two antagonistic races'.

The dream of India's independence was nowhere on the horizon at that time. The British seemed destined to rule the country indefinitely and were taking the first steps toward introducing parliamentary institutions which meant decision by majority votes. Sir Syed was all for proper consultation between the rulers and the ruled and approved of representative institutions. He was also in favour of self-government and had voted for the Local Self-Government Bill. His stand was that, as the Hindus outnumbered the Muslims by more than four to one, the Muslims needed constitutional safeguards to protect them from being crushed.

⁶² C. F. Andrews and Girja Mookerjee, *The Rise and Growth of the Congress in India*, London, 1938, p. 138.

His sense of practical politics was so acute that the concrete concessions he had spelled out for the Muslims because of their 'political importance' were by and large adopted by the Muslim League as its platform. Indeed, the Muslim League itself was virtually a child of his Muhammadan Educational Conference.

During Sir Syed's burial, a lifelong friend of his said, 'Other men have written books and founded colleges; but to arrest, as with a wall, the degeneration of a whole people - that is work of a prophet'.⁶³ As Hector Bolitho has pointed out in his book, *Jinnah, Creator of Pakistan*, Syed Ahmed Khan 'was the father of all that was to happen ultimately, in Mohammad Ali Jinnah's mind'.⁶⁴

Foundation of the Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress claiming to stand for all-India nationalism⁶⁵ was founded in 1885 by Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912), a Scotsman, who had retired from the Indian Civil Service to devote his life to Indian political regeneration.

Hume at first intended to call the proposed organization 'The Indian National Union'. It held a preliminary meeting in March 1885 and decided to convene a conference at the end of that year. A circular invitation stated:

A conference of the Indian National Union will be held at Poona from the 25th to the 31st December 1885... composed of Delegates - leading politicians well acquainted with the English language - from all parts of the Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies. The direct objects of the conference will be:

⁶³ C. F. Andrews and Girja Mukerjee, *The Rise and Growth of the Congress in India*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ p. 38.

⁶⁵ The history of Indian nationalism may be said to have formally begun when in 1885 seventy-two Indians, from most parts of India, assembled at Bombay to attend the first session of the Indian National Congress' (R. Coupland, *The Indian Problem 1883-1933*, op. cit., p. 23).

(1) To enable all the most earnest labourers in the cause of national progress to become personally known to each other; (2) to discuss and decide upon the political operations to be undertaken during the year. Indirectly this conference will form the germ of a native Parliament and, if properly conducted, will constitute in a few years an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions...

In the event the venue of the conference had to be changed from Poona to Bombay because of an outbreak of cholera at Poona a few days before it was due to meet. The word 'Congress' was also substituted for 'Conference' in the description of the assembly on the eve of its meeting.

That the invitation was confined to 'leading politicians well acquainted with the English language' immediately qualified a larger number of Hindus than Muslims as delegates because the Hindus had taken more readily to Western education than the Muslims who had been too stunned by the loss of their empire to be able to adjust to the new conditions to the same extent. The Congress attachment to the English language was re-affirmed by a resolution passed at the twenty-seventh session (1912) which laid down that, 'A person ignorant of English should be held ineligible for membership' of the Imperial Legislative Council (Resolution VIII clause 8).

The goodwill of the Congress for Britain during the early years of its life and Congress' earnest desire that free India must adopt the British Parliamentary System as its constitution are well brought out in the Presidential address to the Eleventh Congress (December 1895) of Surendra Nath Banerji:

It is not severance [from Britain] that we look forward to - but unification, permanent