

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### HANDLING THE PLIGHT OF SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS UNDER BRITISH RAJ: A STUDY OF THE APPROACHES, CONTRIBUTION AND LEGACY OF ALIGARH MOVEMENT

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Handling The Plight Of South Asian Muslims Under British Raj: A Study Of The  
Approaches, Contribution And Legacy Of Aligarh Movement-- PalArch's Journal Of  
Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 19(4), 688-700. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Colonialism, British imperialism, Modernism, Loyalism, Orthodoxy,  
Aligarh movement, Reformation,**

#### **ABSTRACT**

Societies witness their decline when they become indifferent or adversary towards newness, progressivism and technological advancements; so was happened with Mughal Empire in India. Intended to uplift the moral of the decayed and degenerated Indian Muslim society facing a desperate plight resulting from the fiasco of First War of Independence 1857 against British East India Company, Aligarh Movement founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan appeared to reform the society empowering it with modern education, and by condemning the traditionalism, religious orthodoxy and feelings of antagonism towards the colonial masters of India. It literally infused a new spirit among the Muslim community of South Asia, helped it a great deal come out of desperation and make progress in distinct fields of social life. This research paper goes into the socio-political milieu of India which became the rationale of the emergence of Aligarh movement, the vision and mission of its founder, the intellectual and educational services he rendered, and the legacy this movement left. Further, it highlights and gives an assessment to the some of its salient educational characteristics in comparison to one of the contemporary educational and reformist movements, i.e. Darul Ulum Deoband movement, which too took up the task of the renaissance of the Muslim society of South Asia by sticking out for dissemination of the orthodox and conventional religious education. The study argues that although Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had been and is continued to be criticized for his

rationalist, naturalist and loyalist approaches by the orthodox circles, yet it his vision and mission rightly responded to the challenges faced by the Indian Muslims then, and his movement left a legacy which gave rise to various other political and intellectual movements in South Asia. The methodology deployed in the discourse is descriptive, analytical and comparative.

## INTRODUCTION

The grandeur of the Muslim rule in India ended with the collapse of Mughal Empire in the wake of the incident of war between British East India Company and native Indians, which is remembered as the Great Revolt or the First War of Independence 1857. Consequently, the Muslims of South Asia had to confront with serious setback in all domains of their social life. Following a year, India got colonized by the Britain and the Muslim became the subject of the revenge and wrath of their colonial masters.

Realizing such an agonizing situation and vulnerability of Indian Muslims, the various renaissance and reformist movements emerged to bring them out of their predicament and plight, demonstrating their distinct approaches and vision endeavoring to elevate their moral and recuing them from further erosion, disintegration and degeneration. For instance, Darul Ulum Deoband Movement was initiated by the Muslim theologians and veterans of the War of Independence like Maulana Qasim Nanautavi (b. 1833-d. 1880) in 1866, aiming at reforming the society in the line with the philosophy and teachings of Shah Wali Allah Muhaddis Dehlawi (b. 1703-d. 1762). Aligarh Movement was founded by Sir Ahmad Khan (b. 1817-d. 1898) in 1875, who wanted to empower the Indian the Indian Muslims with scientific and modern knowledge. Anjuman-e Hamayat-e Islam was founded by Qazi Khalifa Hamid-ud-Din (b. 1842-d. 1897) in 1884, which came up with an agenda of uplifting Indian Muslims through philanthropic activism, educational development and missionary activities. Then, Nadavatul Ulema which was founded by Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungeri (b. 1846-d. 1927) in 1894, and this institution intended to reform the society with an approach of reconciling orthodoxy and modernism—patching up the distinct educationist tendencies of the both, Darul Ulum Deoband Movement and Aligarh Movement. The hinging point of all these movements was that they recognized the education as the most productive strategy to achieve the goal of reforming and uplifting the desolate Indian Muslims under the yoke of British imperialism.

The present study, nonetheless, aims at discussing and evaluating the role and contribution of Aligarh movement founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who adopted and propagated the approaches like loyalism, modernism and progressivism. This movement immensely campaigned to convince the Muslims for that the only solution to their predicament is acquiring modern, scientific and technological education. Unlike other conservative and orthodox schools of thoughts like Darul Ulum Deoband which opposed British imperialism and process of modernization in India considering it a threats to Muslims' cultural and religious integrity, Aligarh movement spread out the message of loyalism towards the British raj in India. This papers gives an evaluation to the socio-political circumstances became the rationale of the emergence of this movement. It sheds light on the vision and ideologies it

endorsed and promoted, the strategies it devised to materialize its vision, and the services it offered to change the fate the worried India Muslim masses. Further, it examines the intellectual and political services of the Aligarh movement, which it rendered to respond the challenges faced by the Indian Muslims, particularly the in colonial period from 1857 to 1947. This study also provide a comparison academic and structural administration of education institutions established the Aligarh movement and Darul Ulum Deoband movement, and expresses how the Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's vision and ideology took triumph over that of orthodox ulema. The methodology deployed in this study is descriptive, analytical, and critical.

It seems rather appropriate to begin with viewing the socio-political environment of South Asia, which compelled Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to start a campaign of reforming the Muslim society in agreement with modernism introduced by the British in India.

### ***Socio-political Conditions of Indian Muslims Following the Great Revolt 1857***

The situation of Indian Muslims after the War of Independence 1857 had been discernably unpleasant and pathetic, for the reason that the British held the Muslims greater accountable for the outbreak of combat than the Hindus. Consequently, the Muslims were sacked from the government services considering them a threat to the security of the Englishmen. A Scottish historian and a member of Indian Civil Service, William Wilson Hunter (1840-1900) writes it:

“With regard... the first two great sources of Muhammadan wealth, viz. the Army and the higher administration of the Revenues, we had good reasons for what we did, but our action has brought ruin upon Muhammadan Houses of Bengal. We shut the Musalman aristocracy out of the Army, because we believed that their exclusion was necessary to our own safety. We deprived them of their monopoly of the most lucrative functions in the Administration, because their deprivation was essential to the welfare and just government of the people. But these grounds, however good in themselves, fail to convince an ancient nobility suffering under the blight of British Rule.”<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the punitive attitude of the British, the Muslims had to be suffered a lot and turned to be a backward Indian minority community. They lagged behind in education and in the understanding about changing socio-political arena under the colonial masters. They were now a depressed and marginal segment of Indian society, finding themselves unable to defend and safeguard their basic rights even. It was a time of their economic, political, social decay. They were being maligned and defamed by the Orientalist scholars and historians who portrayed their religious and cultural history, their social values and identity in a highly negative way. They showed the Muslim rulers as foreigners and oppressors, and the period of their rule a darkest chapter in Indian history.

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<sup>1</sup> W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Muslims* (London: Trubner & Company, 1876), Republished (California: Sani H. Panhawar, 2015), 99.

‘Almost all available books on Indian history the period of Muslim rule in India is depicted in the darkest possible colours and Muslim rulers are almost invariably described as tyrants and blood thirsty monsters, whose unrestrained autocracy, it is alleged, found its full expression in fanaticism—in the forcible propagation of Islam, in the persecution of Hindus, in the destruction of their temples and in suppression of their genius. No Avenue is left unexplored and no piece of evidence is left unexploited to show that while Muslim rulers rolled in luxuries, the ruled groaned under gross inequalities and servile conditions.’<sup>2</sup>

Responding to such a worst situation of Indian Muslims, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan came forward and attempted at rescuing the Muslims bring them out of their disgraceful and wretched conditions. He guided the Muslims to the desirable course and tried to draw out the Muslims from such helpless conditions. He commenced out a movement aiming at providing them a decent status in society, which they had in past. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s historic endeavors to uplift the moral and status of Indian Muslim are identified as Aligarh Movement.

### ***Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898): An Intellectual, Social Reformer and Educationist***

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was a distinguished Muslim social-reformer, theologian, progressive scholar, rationalist thinker, voluminous writer, and a politician who possessed a phenomenal abilities of leadership with meticulous foresight. On October 17, 1817, Syed Ahmed was born in Delhi. He grew up in a family that had strange ties to the Mughal Court. He came from a wealthy family that was well-reputed and respected in the community. His grandfather Syed Hadi Alamgir was a prominent figure in the Mughal court, while his father Syed Muttaqi Mohammad served as an advisor to Emperor Akbar II. His father took a number of measures to guarantee that his child would receive an excellent education. He actively participated in his educational pursuits and acquired knowledge of the Quran, Persian, Arabic, Mathematics, and medicine. He, nonetheless, made the decision to drop out of his regular course and instead pursued for private study. His passion for reading was particularly strong. Syed Ahmad Khan joined the East India Company as a clerk after the passing of his father and eventually rose to the position of judge in the district court. Despite the fact that he had a traditional education, the Muslim Community of South Asia saw his educational work as a model of contemporary education and training.

Sir Syed is credited with saving the lives of several English women and children during this period of upheaval and unrest at Bijnaur, where he was Chief Judge at the time the War of Independence eventually broke out in 1857. He was offered a wealthy estate by the British in return for his allegiance, but he turned it down. He was appointed Chief Justice of Muradabad before being moved to Ghazipore. In 1864, he was sent to Aligarh, where he was instrumental in founding a new college. In 1876, he gave up practicing law to concentrate on

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<sup>2</sup> S. M. Jaffar, *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India* (Peshawar: S. Muhammad Sadiq Khan Publishers, 1950), 1.

founding and directing the institution, using his whole energy to elevate the socio-political prestige of South Asian Muslims.

An eminent student of Aligarh College, a cofounder of Jamia Millia Islamia and a renowned exponent of the Khilafat Movement (1919–1924), Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar (1878–1931) remarked that Aligarh College was built to provide young Muslims with a center with a real Islamic environment, so that its graduates would not only be educated and cultured men but educated and cultured Muslims. The Aligarh Movement eventually played a vitally important part in deciding the future direction of their political goals and actions and achieving the necessary successes by turning it into a center of the Muslim Renaissance in South Asia.

### ***Well-reputed Intellectual Works of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan***

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a prolific writer and authored a number of works with the intention of helping Indian Muslims embrace modernity and adopt a logical mindset. His intellectual enterprises include inter alia: Tafsirul Quran [Exegesis of Quran], Khutbat-e Ahmadiya [Sermons of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan], Ahkam Tu'am Ahl-e Kittab [Ordinances about the Question of Eating with The People of the Book], Izalatul Ghain an Zulkarnain [Exposition of Misunderstanding about Zulqarnain]. He produced Rasala-e Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind [A Pamphlet on Cause of Indian Revolt] in an effort to dispel mistrust and doubt between the colonial rulers and the Muslims. It argues that it was not Russia and Iran that played a role in the outbreak of The Great Revolt of 1857, nor was that it an organized, planned war between Indians and the East India Company. Instead, the British themselves should be blamed for this rebellion. It was repressive policies of the British and their disregard for the condition of the ordinary people that fueled the rage and dissatisfaction of the common citizens as well as Indian Company troops and led to this tragic incident.<sup>3</sup> Moinuddin Aqeel (b. 1946), who is a Professor of Urdu at Karachi University and an editor of Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind, admires his endeavors asserting it: “After the Revolt, he penned the book *The Causes of the Indian Mutiny*— a daring critique, at the time, of British policies that he blamed for causing the uprising.”<sup>4</sup> In his work Tafsir al-Quran [Exegesis of Holy Quran], Sir Syed Ahmad Khan endeavored to offer naturalist or scientific interpretations of the verses of the Quran and the historical events they depict. The author received harsh criticism from the orthodox theologians of Islam for rejecting divine intervention in the historical process and miracles manifested by the Prophethood.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's *Izalatul Ghain An Zulkarnain* [Exposition of Misunderstandings about Zulqarnain] is an interpretation on the Quranic verse telling a tale of “Zulqarnain.” He claims that Zulqarnain was the name of the emperor or monarch who held power over a sizable chunk of the country. Sir

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind* [Causes of Indian Revolt] (Lahore: Matbua-e Mustafa Press, 1978). Apart from this book which discusses the causes of the mutiny, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan also penned the event of the mutiny in another book titled *Tarikh-e Sarkashi-i Bijnore* [History of the Mutiny of Bijnore District].

<sup>4</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind*,

Syed delves into further depth regarding the moniker “Zulqarnain” and enquired into the background of the deities revered by the Arabs in pre-Islamic era.

The Muslims of Indian under the influence of orthodox ulema kept the distance from the British, considering them non-Muslims. Syed Ahmad in his *Akham-e Tuam Ahl-e Kitab* [Commandments regarding Dining with Those Who Were Given a Book] discusses it, if Muslims are allowed to dine with non-Muslims or Englishmen. He penned a lengthy essay in which he makes the argument that Muslims should consume meals prepared by the British in their utensils based on his interpretation of Quranic teachings, Prophetic traditions, and Muslim jurists’ viewpoints. He adds that they may also consume meat from animals or birds that have been butchered by those to whom Allah Almighty has granted a divine book.

### *Endorsement for Loyatism and Naturalist Rationality*

Sir Syed Ahmad’s modernist approach, loyalty to the British Raj, and naturalist interpretations of Islam drew scathing condemnation from orthodox circles of his day and even afterwards. He was, nevertheless, of the opinion that Muslims lacked the technological and scientific aptitude to compete with the British and, as a result, were unable to restore their waning political stature by waging violent resistances against the colonial masters. Thus, in order to reconcile the Muslims’ effort to improve their socioeconomic situation with the administrative and development plans of the British government, he endeavored to convince the Indian Muslims to adopt a loyalism towards the British Raj. He advised Indian Muslims to pursue modern education so they could work for the government, notably in the ICS and judiciary.<sup>5</sup>

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan supplied Islamic infusions with naturalist or scientific interpretations in order to modernize Indian Muslims. For this, he endured severe criticism from his contemporaries in the field of religion, and the majority of theologians today continue to reject his views on Islam. He has received harsh condemnation from ulema for several of his ideas and naturalist explanations of the Holy Quran, and they view him as a kafir (unbeliever) or heretic. In justification to his views, Sir Syed yet asserts that Quran is the word of God, and the nature is the work of God, and those are not in contradiction to one another anyhow.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan opposed the ICS exams and services as subordinate judges. Arshad Alam accordingly puts it: “The Congress made two recommendations, both of which upset Syed Ahmed. The first proposal was to make the council more representative by introducing the principle of elections. The second proposal was to bring competitive exams for the Indian Civil Service (ICS) to India. Related to this was the demand that there should be competitive exams for lower bureaucratic positions such as Tehsildar and subordinate judges. While Syed Ahmed did not say anything about the need to bring the ICS exam to India, so he might have passively supported the move, but he was completely opposed to competitive exams for subordinate positions. Moreover, he made it amply clear as to why he was opposing it.” Arshad Alam, “Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and His Educational Ideas,” *Contemporary Educational Dialogue*, Vol. I, No. 16 (2019), 112. At [Syed Ahmed Khan and His Educational Ideas \(sagepub.com\)](https://www.sagepub.com) (Accessed on August 19, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Ali and Sayyid Ahsan, *Contribution of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to Islamic Studies: Seminar Papers* (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 2005), 100.

### *Socio-cultural Reformation through Modern Education*

After the Great Rebellion of 1857, the Muslims in India experienced severe economic and political challenges as well as the socio-cultural degeneration. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a scholar who saw the downfall of Indian Muslims a consequence of their emotional adherence to their faith rather than pragmatic and scientific reasons. He believed that Muslims could never achieve a dignified social and political status without acquiring scientific and technological knowledge, and that they could never be able to get rid of their economic vulnerability unless make themselves capable enough to respond their contemporary challenges. He felt that any confrontation with the colonial masters would lead to nothing but turmoil and further degradation of the Muslim society. He therefore began reforming the society by encouraging Indian Muslims to gain western knowledges, and by attempting to synthesis their religio-cultural character with that of the British. He did so, as he considered that the British had become capable of establishing a Great Empire—extending over America, Australia, South Asia, and Africa—only by virtue of their scientific and technological advancements.<sup>7</sup> According to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, this reformation is only conceivable if the Muslim community of India breaks free from religious rigidity and combines Islam with a westernized modern value system. Mazharuddin Siddiqi thus states, “The basic motive behind Sir Sayyid’s religious ideology seems to have been a keen desire to effect a religious reformation in the Muslim world parallel to Protestant Reformation in Europe.”<sup>8</sup> The religion, to him, “was about to love and service to humanity, and not a hurdle to progress...”<sup>9</sup>

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the originator of the Aligarh Movement, supported religious innovations while criticizing old approaches to coping with sociopolitical challenges and difficulties. In a memorial to him, Professor Mushirul Hasan (1949-2018) writes it:

“For a man tutored in feudal family that had experienced the trauma of declining Mughal Empire, he was high pragmatic and realistic in his orientation and attitude. For a man tutored in Islamic learning, he was remarkably broad-minded and forward-looking. He was a visible symbol of Muslim regeneration, a catalyst of social and educational reforms.... He possessed the intellectual sources to reconcile matters of faith with more immediate task of rescuing the Muslims from their downward spiral. He laid stress on interpretation and not conformity, on innovation rather than blind acceptance of Islamic Law.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See, John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Mazharuddin Siddiqi, “Religious Thoughts of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (September 1967), 289.

<sup>9</sup> Yasmin Shaikia, “Sir Sayyid on History: The Indian Revolt of 1857 and Rethinking of ‘Rebellious’ Muslim Question,” in Yasmin Shaikai and M. Raisur Rehman (ed.), *Cambridge Campaigning to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 11.

<sup>10</sup> Mushirul Hasan, “Aligarh’s Notre Eminent Contemporarian: Assessing Syed Ahmad Khan’s Reformist Agenda,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 19, (May 9-15, 1998), 1077-1081.

Although the overwhelming Muslim masses continue to criticize Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's interpretations of Islamic teachings, he cleared the path for *ijtihad* (literal meaning, independent thinking), which was subsequently stressed by a Muslim nationalist ideologue Allama Muhammad Iqbal as a cure for Muslims experiencing political decline in South Asia or in other parts of the globe.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Socio-Cultural and Political Legacy of Aligarh Movement***

Aligarh Movement under Sir Syed Ahmad Khan although received severe criticism from the orthodox circles of Muslim theologians, it acquired a contribution of numbers of Muslim ideologues and left enormous socio-political and cultural legacy for the Muslims of South Asia. It produced impressive leadership who inspired development of Urdu literature and language. The persons like Baba-e Urdu Maulvi Abdul Haq (1870–1961), whose outstanding contribution to the inception and development of Urdu journalism in Colonial India is remarkable and unforgettable, was an outcome of this very institution. Nawab Muhsin-ul-Muluk (1837-1907) and Nawab Waqar-ul-Muluk (1841-1917) were among the founders of All India Muslim League 1906—the political party formed to defend the rights of Indian Muslim in colonial period. They were associated with Aligarh Movement. A prominent historian from Pakistan, Professor Sharif Al-Mujahid (1926-2020) states:

“Within a brief span of some fifty years between 1880s and 1930s, three outstanding Muslim leaders who had so enthusiastically started out as staunch Indian nationalists, ended up finally at strong threshold of Muslim nationalism. In the ultimate analysis, their pragmatic shift from one end of political spectrum to the other was responsible for Muslims carving out themselves a separate destiny and an independent state of their own of India's body politics. They were Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Allama Iqbal, and Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah. Jinnah became a founding father of Pakistan, Iqbal poet-philosopher and ideologue, and Sir Syed, though hardly perceptible at the time, the founder of Muslim nationalism.”<sup>12</sup>

Along with the development of Muslim nationalism that resulted in the formation of the All India Muslim League and the subsequent establishment of Pakistan, the Aligarh Movement also had a significant impact on the growth of the Marxist, Communist and Progressive movements in British India. Aligarh University produced such intellectuals who joined the ranks and cadres of Communist Party of India (CPI) and its intellection wing Progressive Writers

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<sup>11</sup> To have the deeper insight into Iqbal's endorsement for *Ijtihad*, see the following books: Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (California: Stanford University Press, 2012); Fateh Muhammad Malik, *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Political Thoughts in Islam* (Leicester: University of Leicester, Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism, 2002); Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2003); Vahid 'Ishrat, *Iqbal's Philosophy* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2007); Iqbal Sing Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Chad Hillier, *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Sharif Al Mujahid, “Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Muslim Nationalism in India,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (Spring, 1999), 87-101.



Association (PWA),<sup>13</sup> including Khawaja Ahmad Abbas (1914–1984), Sardar Jaffari (1913–2000), Bari Alig, and Sibte Hassan (1916–1986). Furthermore, the historians who produced historical works concentrating on secular, pluralistic, and anti-communal viewpoints on Indian history include Muhammad Habib (1895–1971), Irfan Habib (1931), and Mashirul Hassan (1949–2018), who were all the professionally trained historians and pioneers of Marxist historiographical tradition in South Asia.

### ***An Assessment to the Contribution and Ideological Approach of Aligarh Movement***

Various renaissance movements in South Asia evolved as an aftermath of the fall of the Mughal Empire and the British occupation of India's political and administrative affairs with the goal of reshaping and saving the country's Muslims. The Deoband movement's supporters never seemed prepared to accept British rule or the modernity they brought to India, but the Aligarh movement seemed to take a position of amicably accepting the imperialist framework of the British raj. Thus, they resisted the British raj in either an overt or clandestine manner. This section of the article provides a critical assessment of the ideological, structural, and strategic distinctions between Aligarh movement and Darul Ulum Deoband movement which was ideological opposed to the farmer.

### ***The Philosophy behind Modernist and Orthodox Stances of the Renaissance Movements in South Asia***

The orthodox ulema like the founders and proponents of Darul Ulum Deoband were ardent supporters of Shah Wali Allah's doctrine, and several of them had taken part in the uprising against the East India Company.<sup>14</sup> They firmly believed that Indian Muslims needed to uphold and build Islamic cultural and values as well as solidify their identity by strengthening their orthodox beliefs. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the leader of the Aligarh movement, contrarily, considered that the Muslim community in relation to the British Raj was not strong, matured, or disciplined enough to restore their former position as it was before the British takeover of India's political affairs. He contended that the Great Revolt of 1857 demonstrated conclusively that the aggressive opposition of Indians to the British would not succeed since the latter were well-equipped

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<sup>13</sup> To know details about Communist Party of India (CPI) and Progressive Writers Association (PWA), the following books may be consulted: E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India* (New Delhi: Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India, 1963); Minocheher Rustom Masani, *The Communist Party of India: A Short History* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1967); N. D. Gupta, *Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India 1939-45* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008); Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India: Events, Processes and Ideologies* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); David Lockwood, *Communist Party of India and Indian Emergency* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2016); Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India: Events, Processes and Ideologies* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Talat Ahmad, *Literature and Politics in Age of Nationalism* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Past: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi, *Islamic Renaissance in South Asia: The Role Shah Wali Allah and His Successors* (Islamic Research Institute, 2002); Farhat Tabassum, *Deoband Ulema's Movement for the Freedom of India* (New Delhi: Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, 2005), 20; Dr. Abdullah Fahad, *Objectives of Shariah: Introduction and Application* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilamiyah, 2015), 25.

with modern scientific and technical developments. Thus, the Muslim should prepare themselves accordingly to get the respectable status in newly evolving socio-political scenario.

### ***Opposition to the Traditional Education and Introduction of Modern Western Education***

Over the course of Muslim history in India, the education institutions established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan were the first ones which were established to impart modern education to the Indian Muslims. Darul Ulum Deoband departing the traditional and conventional education the students, its curriculum included those course which were being taught to the students in rest of the Muslim World: for instance, tafsir (i.e. exegesis), asol-e tafsir (i.e. the principles of exegesis), hadith (i.e. tradition), asol-e hadith (i.e. principles of tradition), serf-o nahw (i.e. conjugation and syntax), Arabi Adab (Arabic Literature), mantaq (logic), falsafa (philosophy), fiqah (Islamic jurisprudence), ilm-e biyan (rhetoric), ilm-e kalam (dialect), hiyat (nature), ilm-o al-fraiz (obligations).<sup>15</sup>

The orthodox theologians perceived the modernity promoted by the British raj as a vital threat to Islamic cultural values and regarded the traditional knowledges as one having the driving force. Maulana Qasim Nanutwi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi initially resisted educating logic and philosophy to students at the Madrassah-e Darul Ulum. They were against these subjects for two reasons; first, by doing so, the eight-year degree program would be shortened to six years and the passed out student would soon be able to serve in other madrassahs as tutors. Second, these subjects were not perceived by them so essential to be read. Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi vehemently denounced the teaching of logic, arguing that teaching English language is far better than these subjects, as it might help gain material benefits at least. Darul Ulum did not offer these disciplines to the students enrolled in course work of Dars-i-Nizami until 1893 when this policy nonetheless was criticized by other ulema and the madrassah administration included the courses into its study scheme.

Sir Syed, nonetheless, has reached to the conclusion that the sociocultural and educational stagnation was the one of fundamental reasons of Muslims' political decline as well as the worst socio-economic conditions faced by them. In addition, he propounded that no nation could improve its socio-political standing without modern education.<sup>16</sup> The promotion of scientific and technological education for Indians became primary motive of his movement. The propriety agenda in the institute he established, thus, was make it sure that the disciplines of science would be more widely available to the students.

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<sup>15</sup> Maulana Muhammad Tayyab, *Tarikh-e Darul Ulum Deoband [History of Darul Ulum Deoband]* (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 1973), 34-47.

<sup>16</sup> See, David Lelyveld, "Naicari Nature: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Reconciliation of Science, Technology and Religion," in Yasmin Shaikia and M. Raisur Rehman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 69-87, Muhammad Ashraf, "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Vision of Scientific Education," Center for Islamic Pluralism (February 19, 2016) at: [Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan's Vision of Scientific Education: The Aligarh Movement and Educational Modernization of South Asian Muslims :: Center for Islamic Pluralism](#) (dated, June 5, 2022).

### *The Medium of Instruction: English versus Vernacular Languages*

Languages are said to be a symbolic representation of cultural and ideological outlook as well as the attributes of the society. Orthodox Deoband theologians decided to adopt the vernacular languages, particularly Urdu, as the medium of instruction to impart the religious knowledge to indigenous students. The impact and implications of making Urdu a medium of instruction to teach theology were greatly discernable in socio-cultural and religious environment of South Asia.

It would have been debut instance that Urdu was used as a language of instruction at a madrassah rather than Arabic or Farsi (i.e. Persian), which resulted in broking up the ecclesiastical elites' monopoly and supremacy. Introducing Urdu as a medium of instruction was a tactic used by Deoband madrassah to make religious knowledge easily accessible and understandable to the wider populace. The introduction of Urdu enticed many students to religious education, and it played a vital role in developing and promoting Urdu throughout the colonial era. This strategy of using Urdu as more than just a means of communication aided in its expansion outside of Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, and Banaras, where it began and evolved. Several Deoband scholars authored their most famous works in Urdu, such as the interpretation of the Holy Quran or books on ordinary everyday problems and demeanors such as *Bahishti Zewar* by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1863-1948).<sup>17</sup>

A leading proponent of acquiring the modern western education, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan advocated for English, rather than vernacular languages, as medium of instruction in the educational institutions set up by the British raj in India. In an essay published in both Urdu and English, he criticized the government for establishing vernacular school, arguing that government perhaps intended to introduce vernaculars so as to smooth the process of learning for the South Asian people and for that this would save their time from learning the rules of some foreign language. There is denying in that the Europeans and Arabs had learnt and made progress in myriad knowledges by virtue of the native languages. Nonetheless, the government should not overlook the fact that the vernaculars lack the real potential of being means of appropriate communication for western knowledges. He criticized adoption of Urdu as medium of instruction in public schools mainly for three reasons: first, the peculiar literature of subject matter is unavailable, which thus makes the education of it impossible. Secondly, the vernaculars are not so developed to be published and printed. Thirdly, those are deficient of developing the students' capacity and potential to excel in the subjects being studied. He concludes is argument by demanding that government should replace Urdu with the language (English) capable enough of producing the required results.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, later on, there came a shift on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1867, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, nonetheless, started a campaign for a vernacular university writing a request on behalf of British Indian Association North-western districts to Viceroy and Governor

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<sup>17</sup> Ashraf Ali Thanwi, *Bahishti Zewar* (Lahore: Zam Zam Publishers, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-e Javed [Eternity]* (Lahore: Zahid Bashir Printer, 2000), 99-103.

General demanding a vernacular university that impart education in myriad disciplines in native languages.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Collaboration with the Government for Financial Assistance***

Since the government found loyalist and modernist approaches of Aligarh movement an instrumental to grow a trust between government and Indian masses, it got readily convinced to fund its educational activities. The Muhammadan College Fund Committee established by Sir Syed and the government of British India, thus, were the major donors to the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College. These contributions were given specifically to help the Arabic and science departments grow.<sup>20</sup> He also appealed for funds from the landlord class as well as common people under their control.<sup>21</sup> The educational institutions launched by the founders of the Aligarh Movement were rigorously built on western academic and administrative principles. It is worth noting here that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's biggest accomplishment was that he fostered these western-styled educational ideas while they were deemed forbidden by mainstream Indian Muslims. On the other hand, Darul Ulum Deoband was formed and is entirely supported by public donations. It neither received nor requested donations from the government or the Muslim nobles. This allowed Deoband Madrassah to operate autonomously and reject any influence or interference from powerful social groupings. Despite that the Madrasah disseminated conventional, traditional and orthodox religious education, its administrative and organizational structure was both visionary and contemporary in orientation. In her paper, 'The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India,' Barbara Metcalf (1978) expounds that it was certainly a break from India's pre-existing conventional educational framework and was heavily modeled on the English bureaucratic archetypal.<sup>22</sup> This however becomes evident that be it an institution imparting modern education or the one disseminating orthodox education were greatly influenced by modernist organizational and bureaucratic structures introduced by the British raj in India.

### ***Ideological Triumph of Aligarh Movement***

Muslim theologians who were the founders or the representative of Darul Ulum Deoband movement remained in militant conflict with the British from the First War of Independence to 1957 to the failure of Silk Letter Conspiracy in 1923. So as to demonstrate their political strength and to streamline their political activism, a group of Deoband theologians decided to form a political party

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<sup>19</sup> Hali, Hayat-e Javed, 153.

<sup>20</sup> Gail Minault and David Lelyveld, "The Campaign for Muslim University 1898-1920," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (March, 1974), pp. 145-189.

<sup>21</sup> Hali, Hayat-e Javed, 158.

<sup>22</sup> The teachers assigned by madrassah officials to train the pupils were highly qualified experts. As soon as it was feasible, the Madrasah obtained separate classroom buildings, libraries, and hostels. It was the first time in Indian Muslim education history that a specified curriculum and duration for the course were managed to imply for the courses. The yearly performance assessment reports were also one of the most original and revolutionary initiatives in the history of Islamic educational institutions in South Asian Muslims. Barbara Metcalf, "Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (1978), 112.

named Jamiat Ulama-e Hind (literal meaning Party of Indian Muslims Theologian).<sup>23</sup> This was obviously an ideological triumph of Aligarh Movement—and the foresight of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan—which just after the War of Independence or the Great Revolt started convincing the Muslims to avoid militant confrontation towards the British raj and be the part of process of modernization it had introduced in India, since the Muslims were far behind in scientific and technological field and this problem could only be overcome through acquiring modern education.

### CONCLUSION

Concluding the above discussion, it appears that after the decline of Mughal Empire and political takeover of British Raj in India, the Indian Muslims had to confront with grave political and economic crisis, and consequently the educational movements appeared to rescue them, showing different ideological approaches towards their plight and means to handle it. In contrast to the Darul Ulum Deoband movement which aimed at confronting British raj either militantly or politically and reforming the Muslim society with orthodox philosophy and by imparting tradition religious education, Aligarh movement founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan emerged to reform and uplift the Muslim society with modernist and loyalist approach, and mainly worked by focusing on the education development of the Indian Muslims. He produced a lot of the literature convincing his coreligionists to be loyal of the government and come out of conventional and orthodox socio-political as well as religious orientation. This movement greatly influenced the socio-cultural tendencies and intellectual behaviors in the society and left discernable political legacy like All India Muslim which is accredited to be the founder of separate Muslim state in South Asia, i.e. Pakistan. The success of its modernist approach can be gauged by the fact that anti-imperialist theologians associated with Darul Ulum Deoband, in second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, recognized the principle of the western democracy, formed a political party Jamiat Ulama-e Hind and entered into the mainstream politics, shedding off the conspiratorial and confrontational politics towards the British raj.

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<sup>23</sup> Political involvement pushed them closer to the Indian National Congress during the Khilafat Movement (1920-1924). The aims and character of the party's political battle are expressed by the fact that these theologians met in Peshawar in 1917 and sought independence, long before the Indian National Congress.