
REFORMING SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONDITION OF MUSLIMS: MISSION OF SIR SAYYED AHMED KHAN

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INTRODUCTION:

Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan was universally acknowledged as a great visionary, scholar, reformer, educationist, philosopher and thinker of his time. He was born on 17th October 1817 in Delhi. He was well versed in Philosophy, Arabic, Parsi and Urdu literature.

1. **Social Reforms:** Sir Sayyed firmly believed that Muslim community immensely suffered both socially and politically due to the Revolt of 1857. The miserable and pathetic condition of Muslims had saddened the heart of Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan. During the revolt Sir Sayyed was judge of Bijnor and with his timely intervention he could save the lives of many British women and children. After revolt, as a reward he was offered Jagir and one lack rupees for his services by the British government but Sir Sayyed refused it. In his speech delivered at Muslim Educational Conference held on 23 December 1868, he states:

At that time I thought that it would be extremely disgraceful and cowardly on my part to find refuge in some safe corner and leave the people helpless and distress. Now I should share their distress and strive hard to avert the calamity by lifting up their hearts. I gave up the idea of migrating and chose to work for my people. (MEC Dec.23, 1868)

His social reforms were driven by his desire to modernize the Muslim community in India. He felt that Muslim community had become stagnant due to their rigid upbringing, orthodoxy and reluctance to accept new ideas. His social reforms are not just confined to social attitudes of Muslims or their backwardness but he also offers various solutions to their overall problems. He used to believe that writing revolutionary books and articles could help him to create favorable atmosphere for transformation and reform. To bring about his desired change and reformation in the Muslim society, he wrote books like Sunnat Dar Radd-e-Bidat, Tafsir-al-Quran, Khutbat-e-Ahmedia, Kalamat-e-Haq, Asbab-e-Bagawat-e-Hind etc.

Sir Sayyed Ahmed encouraged Muslims to abandon superstitions and customs which had no basis in reason or religion. He argued and proved that true Islamic faith is compatible with modern science and rational thinking. To promote scientific knowledge, he founded **Scientific Society of Aligarh** in 1864. The society translated western science, technology and literature into Urdu which was made accessible to larger audience.

He firmly believed that conservative and conventional attitude of Muslims was the greatest obstacle to the social and intellectual growth of the Muslims.

Through interpretation of Islamic teachings, he explained that Quran encourages pursuit of knowledge rather oppose scientific progress and advancement and also proved that Islamic principles are aligned with the modern ideas of reason and progress.

Sir Sayyed advocated four formulas for social reform-----

- a) Education
- b) Knowledge
- c) Awareness
- d) Character Building

Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan also worked to eradicate several social unwanted customs within the Muslim community. He severely criticized polygamy, child marriage. He also spoke against practice of extravagant marriages and dowries which placed a financial burden on families. So he encouraged simple marriage ceremonies. He would believe that all these social evils were hindrance in the growth and progress of the society.

Sir Sayyed promoted Urdu as the language of modern education for Muslims. He believed that Urdu was crucial part of Muslim cultural identity. In 1873, when non-Urdu speakers protested against the use of Urdu in government courts, Sir Sayyed established the league for the defense of the Urdu language. He remarks, 'No other loss except the loss of their religion could be compared to it.' (Hassan, 1959). Sir Sayyed would say English is essential for material progress but Urdu is essential to keep alive cultural, political identity, legacy and heritage of Muslims.

Sir Sayyed with his writings made his intentions clear that he was a social reformer and wished to eradicate the impractical practices from Muslim society. Sir Sayyed's ideas were based on reasoning and logic. His essays

like Rasomat and Bahes-o-Takrar manifested his ideas about ill practices in Muslim society. To propagate his ideology he started two journals- i) Tahzibul Akhlaq and ii) Muhsinul Mulk

In order to convince and create favorable atmosphere for adopting modern education, Sir Sayyed started the Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq in Dec. 1870.

These journals stirred the orthodox classes deeply and they opposed and criticized him severely. Despite criticism Sir Sayyed continued to keep publishing his journals. He knew that social reforms, eradication of social evils can be possible through effective writings. Sir Sayyed utilized his journals for social reforms and its articles true to its objectives continue to cause social reforms in the Muslim society.

He also wrote book like Asbab-e-Bagawat-e-Hind in order to clarify the misunderstanding of British government. He criticized the policy of blaming Muslims as a cause of revolt.

Sir Sayyed also advocated interfaith harmony for national progress.

2. **Promoting Modern Education:** Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan was fully convinced that modern education is the only instrument by which all the ailments and diseases of Muslim society can be cured. He advocated that modern education and scientific temperament could be beneficial to Muslims in the process of restoring the faded glory of the Muslim community. Sir Sayyed truly regarded education as the instrument in pacing the process of modernization, progress and development among Muslims. His approach to the modern education for upliftment of Muslims was holistic. He stressed on keeping intact distinguished cultural identity by strict adherence to cultural rationality with modern scientific temperament. He wanted to impart education which will cater to the spiritual and material needs of the Muslims. He argued that Muslims needed to embrace modern scientific knowledge, technology to overcome all their socio-economic challenges. Sir Sayyed advocated that English language and modern science should be accepted for material progress of the Muslim community. He believed that proficiency in English is crucial for gaining access to western knowledge. Through modern education Muslims can enable to secure good positions in the British administration and economically empower themselves.

Sir Sayyed respected religious learning but he felt that focusing only on theology will hold back the Muslim community. Hence he wanted holistic learning in which students would be taught modern science, mathematics and history along with theology in school curriculum. The exposure to modern science and rational thoughts would prepare and develop the community to compete with the challenges of modern time. To meet the growing need of modern education to Muslims, Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan established Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875, which later became Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The institution emphasized on blend of traditional Islamic values with modern western education. The institution became a key center in imparting modern education in India and it has produced many intellectuals and leaders.

He encourages women's education. He believed that women play a very significant role in shaping society. Therefore, educated women can perform miracle in overall progress of the Muslim community.

Conclusion: Sir Sayyed Ahmed's contributions were pivotal in shaping modern education and social reforms in India particularly Muslim community. Through his educational and social reforms he emphasized on scientific thinking and modern education. He tried to bridge gap between Islamic teachings and western knowledge. He prepared a progressive outlook among Muslims. Sir Sayyed's vision and initiatives significantly contributed the intellectual and cultural revival of Indian Muslims.

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