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“Sir Syed Ahmed was neither a politician nor a political leader. He was essentially a social reformer and his panacea for all the ills of his community were education.” Hafeez Malik

“Sir Syed was an ardent reformer and he wanted to reconcile modern scientific thought with religion by rationalistic interpretations and not by attacking basic belief. He was anxious to push new education. He was in no way communally separatist. Repeatedly he emphasized that religious differences should have no political and national significance”.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Former Prime Minister of India

### Introduction

The War of Independence 1857, proved catastrophic for the Muslims of Indian Subcontinent. The most serious repercussion was that the British started to believe that the Muslims were chiefly responsible for the anti-British rebellion. Therefore, they imposed ruthless punishments and callous retribution on them. According to the British historians with the rebellion of 1857, this antagonism infuriated and attempts were made to subjugate and suppress the Muslims.

### Conditions of the Muslims after 1857

After deposing the Muslim rulers from the throne, they implemented a new educational policy with radical changes. The policy banned Arabic, Persian and religious education in schools and made English not only the medium of instruction but also the official language in 1835. This germinated a unconstructive attitude amongst the Muslims towards everything modern and western, and a unwillingness to make use of the opportunities on hand under the new administration. This tendency, had it continued for long, would have proven devastating for the Muslim community. The miseries of the Muslims reached at the zenith. The British resolved to squash the Muslims under a premeditated scheme.

## SYED’S ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

His works for the educational development for Muslims shows that he was in no way pro- British. He wanted only development and prosperity of the Muslims.

### Farsi Maddarsa Muradabad

He established a Farsi Maddarsa at Muradabad in 1859. It was the starting point of Sir Syed’s Educational struggle. In this Maddarsa, English is also taught besides English.

### Establishment of ‘The Scientific Society’

“Scientific Society was almost the first learned association In Northern India.” Abdul Hamid (His Visit to England)

In 1860, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was transferred from Muradabad to Ghazipur. His stay in Ghazipur is a milestone in his life. This was the place where Sir Syed took additional responsibility other than creative writings. He established a personal printing press in 1862 for his publications, an English medium school in 1863 and established Scientific Society in 1864. The Scientific Society established at Ghazipur on 9th January, 1864 and later shifted to Aligarh when Sir Syed was transferred to Aligarh. This became a focal point of his dream project which later shaped up as The Aligarh Movement.

### Victoria School Ghazipur

Sir Syed established first modern Victoria School at Ghazipur (1864). In this school, besides Modern Education five languages (English, Urdu, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit) were also taught.

### Aligarh Institute Gazette

During his stay at Aligarh he issued a weekly Gazette called Aligarh Institute Gazette. The Gazette imparted information on history; ancient and modern science of agriculture, natural and physical sciences and advanced mathematics.

### Tehzib-ul-Ikhlaq

On 24th December 1876 he issued his famous magazine named Tehzib-ul-Ikhlaq from Benares in order to apprise the Muslims of their social evils and moral shortcomings. This journal contained articles from influential Muslims who agreed with Sir Syed that there was a need for a new approach to education. This magazine also promoted Urdu language immensely. Although some Ulema attacked the journal, it played a major part in bringing about an intellectual revolution amongst Muslim thinkers.

### Muhammadan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College, Aligarh

In January 1877, M.A.O. College was inaugurated at Aligarh by Lord Lytton the Viceroy of India. The college soon showed tremendous progress. It became the Centre of Muslim educational and intellectual activity in the Sub-Continent. It was a residential institution. Many important Muslim figures like Maulana Shibli, Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar etc. at one time or another remained associated with this college.

## Sir Syed’s Task

“He was the product of those circumstances when one empire had gone into oblivion and another had come into existence. He was like a link which connects glorious parts with uncertain future.”

Jamil Ahmed (100 Great Muslims)

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, one of the architects of modern India was born on October 17, 1817 in Delhi and started his career as a civil servant. The 1857 revolt was one of the turning points of Syed Ahmed’s life. He clearly foresaw the imperative need for the Muslims to acquire proficiency in the English language and modern sciences if the community were to maintain its social and political identity, particularly in Northern India. He was one of those early pioneers who recognised the critical role of education for the empowerment of the poor and backward Muslim community.

## POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Sir Syed had perceived that if the tension between the Muslims and the British continued, Hindus would get advantage of it. To alleviate the tension, he wrote a pamphlet entitled: ‘Essay on the Causes of the Indian Revolt’. In it he proved that Muslims were not responsible for the revolt of 1857. In ‘The Loyal Muhammadans of India’, he described the sincere services of Muslims of India to the British Government. He also established ‘British- Indian Association’. Sir Syed advised the Muslims not to join Indian National Congress as it was altogether a Hindu political organisation.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

He was a great reformer of the Indian society. He started a monthly “Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq” on the pattern of an English magazine ‘Spectator’. This magazine played an important role in improving the morality of the Indian Muslims.

## LITERARY ACTIVITIES

Sir Syed, in his writings, touched all those topics that could not be ignored in practical life. He introduced a new style of expressing thoughts in simple and intelligible prose. For this reason, he may rightly be called the founder of the modern Urdu prose.

## WESTERN DEMOCRACY

If he was pro-British he would have advocated western democracy. But he was against the Western democracy because its ultimate result was the supremacy of Hindu majority over the Muslims.

## URDU LANGUAGE

In 1867, the Hindus began to oppose Urdu language. The Hindus demanded that Urdu should be replaced by Hindi in public offices. Sir Syed opposed every demand of the Hindus. He also opposed the idea of one nation launched by the Congress.

## Conclusion

Sir Syed was pro-development and pro-reforms. He was in no way pro-British. He worked for the welfare of Indians, especially of the Muslims.