

GS Foundation 2024: Modern India
Handout 22: Reform and Revivalism among Indian Muslims (19th century)
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Revivalist Movement

In the 19th century, the decline of the Mughal Empire, the Muslims increasingly became politically insignificant. With the rise of British Colonialism, there was an arrival of Christian missionaries, the political reassertion of Hindus. While the Hindus were quick to accept Western education, the Muslims refused to accept it. Thus, Muslims came under the influence of English education and western ideas very late. So, they were carried away by a revivalist spirit which sought to revive the past and purify Islam.

There were two effective revivalist movements in the early part of the 19th century India:

1. Faraizi/Faraidi Movement in Eastern Bengal

- a. The Faraizi movement was a peasant-cum-religious movement. It earned the name from Arabic word-'Farz' (duty).
- b. It was organised in eastern Bengal under the leadership of **Hazi Sariyattullah** and his son Dadu Miya.
- c. Religious Aspect
 - i. On his return to India from Hajj in 1799, where he was influenced by Wahabism, Shariatullah conjectured that the Muslims of India had been declining as a community mainly since they were practicing Islam, which borrowed rituals from Hinduism and Sufism.
 - ii. They preached a change in the mode of dress to distinguish the Muslims from the non-Muslims.
 - iii. The movement wanted Bengali Muslims to follow pure Islam by discarding borrowings from other religions like worship at Muslim shrines, floating of the bhera (ceremonial boat), ceremonial dances, planting of banana trees (phallic symbols) around the house on the first menstruation of a girl.
 - iv. The Faraizis suspended Friday and Id prayers thinking of India under the British as dar-al-harb (enemy's territory) where these prayers are not required.
- d. Economic Aspect
 - i. The movement was organised against local zamindars (mostly Hindus) and the British indigo planters. It enjoyed the support of local peasants who were the main sufferers under the British rule. To mobilise the Muslim peasant, its leaders used religious symbols.
- e. The movement under the leadership of Dudu Miyan, son of Haji Shariat-ul-Allah, became revolutionary. He organised the movement from village to the provincial level with a Khalifa (authorised deputy) at each level. He organised a para-military force to fight the goons of landlords and the police. He was arrested many times, but after his death in 1862 his movement survived only as a religious movement.

2. Wahabi Movement in North India (Tariqa-e-Muhammadiya)

- a. Teachings of Abd al-Wahab influenced by the Delhi school of Islam. Its objective was to purify Islam by getting rid of any Sufi and Hindu influences, introduce sharia

laws and to restore Dar-ul Islam in India. This movement was led by **Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi**.

- b. A countrywide organisation with an elaborate secret code for its working under spiritual vice-regents (Khalifas) was set up, and Sithana in north western tribal belt was chosen as a base for operations. Since Dar-ul-Harb (the land of kafirs) was to be converted into Dar-ul-Islam (the land of Islam), a jihad was declared against the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab. Thus, initially, this movement was against Sikhs in Punjab.
- c. Sayyid Ahmed paid a visit to Calcutta in 1820 and gained immense popularity. When the British conquered Punjab in 1849, the Wahabi movement targeted the British as well.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Aligarh Movement

- Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-98), the founder of the Aligarh movement is a leading figure in the stream of Muslim movement. He worked as a magistrate in the British Government and was posted at different places in the United Province (U.P). His organised movement to reform the Muslim society was started from Aligarh and was, therefore, called the Aligarh movement.
- **Literary Work:**
 - Sir Ahmad Khan edited "**Tehzeeb-ul-Akhlaq**", a monthly journal.
 - He was pioneer in prose writing in Urdu language. He wrote two famous books in Urdu- **Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind** (1858) and **Asar-us-Sanadid** (on Delhi's architecture)
- **Education reform:**
 - The failure of the revolt of 1857 was a great shock for Indians in general and elite (Ashraf) Muslims, in particular. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan represented the elite Muslims. He was quick to learn that the only way to survive for Muslims was to modernise their institutions and be loyal to the British rule.
 - The ground-work was done at Ghazipur (Eastern U.P.) itself where in 1864, he founded a **modern school and scientific society** to popularise western sciences among Muslims in India. The society translated works on physical sciences into Urdu, the language of masses in northern India.
 - **Trip to the west:** During a trip to England in 1869, Sayyid Ahmad was impressed by British technology, high literacy rates, and a sense of achievement. He believed that cultural superiority and worldly success were connected. He thought that older educated Muslims in India held positions of power, but now, Englishmen in England had exclusive access to equivalent education. Sayyid Ahmad aimed to spread education in India while merging religion and education together.
 - **British Support:**
 - Sayyid Ahmad's concept aligned well with the colonial policy outlined in Hunter's Indian Mussalmans, which aimed to educate a new generation of Muslims with Western knowledge while retaining familiarity with their own religious principles.



- Sayyid Ahmad's efforts to promote English education among Muslim elites received significant support from the British. The Aligarh College received a personal donation of Rs 10,000 from Viceroy Lord Northbrooke.
 - Sir Sayyid Ahmad was regarded by the British as a champion and representative of the Muslim community.
- Getting support of British was easier but to garner favourable opinion among Muslim Ashraf class was difficult. He had to **re-interpret Quran** according to current context of Muslim life to persuade Muslims to accept the western education.
- In 1886, he founded the **Mohammedan Anglo-oriental Conferences** with a view to
 - Enrich the Urdu language through translations of valuable scientific works. Exert political pressure for the acceptance of Urdu as the secondary language in all government and private schools;
 - Emphasise on women education for the development of future generations;
 - Formulate a policy for higher education of Muslim students in Europe.
- Foundation of **Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental college** (1875) to spread modern education among Muslim youths.
- Notions of Nationalism: He advised the Muslims to keep **away from anti-British movement**. With Theodore Beck, he formed **United India Patriotic Association**.
 - Sayyid Ahmad aimed to foster a sense of Muslim solidarity and promote a **qaum** (nation, community) mentality among Aligarh students. He sought to demonstrate that Muslims were loyal rather than hostile to British rule. Sayyid Ahmad advised Muslims to **distance themselves from the Indian National Congress** and expressed concern that Muslims would be marginalized in a representative political system with Hindu population as majority. Thus, unfortunately, from the start, Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement fell victim to the **misguided belief that development for Muslims could only be achieved through a pro-British policy**.
 - Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan held a hostile stance towards the Indian National Congress, leading to the Muslim reforms movement taking a separate path from the mainstream national movement. This has led many historians to view him as a **pioneer of Muslim separatism and a precursor to the concept of the two-nation theory**. However, in one of his notable speeches, Sir Sayyid emphasized the importance of both Hindus and Muslims, comparing them to the **two beautiful eyes of a bride**, and asserting their equal indispensability.
 - What is also important is the success and significance conferred on these ventures by **colonial patronage**.

Deoband Movement

- This school, founded by **Md. Qasim Nanotavi** (1833-77) and **Abdul Rashid Ghangohi** (1829-1905) believed in traditional Islamic thought and was opposed to the British system. The real aim of this school was to reestablish contact between the alim (scholars) and the average Muslims and to reorientate the Muslim Community to its original cultural and religious identity.
- They were veterans of the 1857 Revolt, and attempted to train students in Islamic learning, but along the lines of **western style**, leading to the emergence of a 'Protestant Islam'. The seminary they set up at Deoband took its curriculum from an earlier one in the *farangi mahal* (foreign quarters) of Lucknow. It was a **traditionalist course** of studies, whereas modern science was being ignored.
- They wanted to build a **bridge between Islamic and the modern western rationalist school**.
 - They hoped that a student, if he so wished, could join a modern school or university after completing his theological education at Deoband. Thus, Deoband School regarded itself as an institution, complementary and preliminary to modern westernised schools.
 - Although it was modelled entirely on western educational institutional structures, the Deoband Seminary actually played a **significant role in developing a unified and orthodox Islam in India**. The seminary produced *madrassa* teachers and became prominent at a later stage, for the number of *fatwas* it issued.
- The Deoband group, maintained a "**muted anti-British temper,**" and generally supported **Congress** nationalism in the twentieth century.
 - They criticized Sayyid Ahmad's Aligarh school, his theological innovations, and his loyalty to the British. In fact, they even issued a **Fatwa against Saiyyad Ahmad Khan**.
 - **Maulana Abul Kalam** was affiliated with this movement.
 - The Deobandis vehemently **opposed the two-nation theory** advocated by the Muslim League and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, which led to the creation of Pakistan.



Other movements among Muslims

- **Ahl-e-Hadis movement**
 - It emerged in mid-19th century as an offshoot of Tariqa-e-Muhammadiya movement of the 18th century. It was led by Nawab Siddaq Hasan Khan (of Bhopal) and Syed Nazir Hussain.
 - It rejected everything introduced into Islam after Qur'an, Sunnah, Hadith and the early eras. It was most well known for its vehement opposition to veneration of sufi saints.
- **Ahmadiya Movement**
 - Founded by **Mirza Gulam Ahmad** in the later half of the 19th century in a place called Qazini in Punjab. This movement, which checked the growth of Shuddhi

movement and Christianity. It defended Islam from Arya Samaj and Christian missionaries.

- In 1889, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad declared himself as 'Masih', and '**Mahdi**' (a minor prophet). Later, he also declared himself as incarnation of Krishna and Jesus. The majority of the Muslims, however, opposed both Ghulam Ahmad and his followers known as Ahmadiyas or Qadiyanis. Slowly it became a distinct sect in Islam. However, in Pakistan they are treated as non-Muslims.
- **Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani's Pan-Islamism** (inherently anti-nationalist)
 - Jamal Afghani from Iran believed that embracing Western education could empower Muslims to overcome Western imperialism and establish a global Islamic caliphate.
 - He criticized those who rejected modern education, but he viewed Muslims as a united global community (ummah). Afghani criticized Sir Syed for focusing solely on the situation of Indian Muslims and argued that they should be seen as part of a global Muslim community.