CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

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The nineteenth century of the Christian era forms a watershed in the annals of the Muslim world. The contemporary Muslim society, sunk as it was in obscurantism, inertia and frustration, was helpless to struggle out of its medieval grooves by the scientific development of the West. A number of Muslim reformers like Midhat Pasha and Fu’ad Pasha in Turkey, Hujjat-ul Islam, Shaikh Hadi Najmabadi in Iran, Mustafa Kamil in Egypt, Khairuddin Pasha in Tunis, Amir Abdul Qadir in Algeria, the followers of Maulana Abdul Wahab in Nejd, Emam Mohammad Bin Sanusi in Tripoli, Syed Jamaluddin in Afghanistan, Mufti Alamjan in Russia and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in India, launched movements for the moral and intellectual rejuvenation of Muslim society. Their efforts ultimately crystallized into three distinct reactions to the situation. Some thought that the only panacea to these ills lay in a hark back to the old values of religion through which alone the socio-political system could be resuscitated in consonance with the traditions of early Islam. Others thought that the remedy did not lie in religious revival but in the total acceptance of the Western value and concept. There was a third school of thought which stuck a balance between these two extreme approaches and advocated acceptance of Western education and science while jealously guarding their religious and intellectual identity.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was one of the most towering personalities in the galaxy of the 19th century Muslim reformer. He founded, what Gibb rightly calls,
"The first modernist institution in Islam", and zealously worked to bring about a change in Muslim thought and behaviour. In fact he ushered in the dawn of an era of intellectual renaissance in India and contributed many essential elements to the development of modern India society. ¹

The year 1857 is a turning point in the history of the Indian Muslims. The Muslim political power which had been gradually declining from the beginning of the 18th century, touched its nadir in 1857. The Moghal Empire- for decades and apparition of its former self- was finally liquidated in the terrible blood bath of 1857. But it was more than a mere polity; it symbolised a culture round which the entire fabric of Muslim social behaviour had been woven through the centuries. Its collapse, therefore dried up the source of the milieu and left the Muslims helpless and broken. Steeped in medievalism, broken hearted and frustrated, they found themselves in a blind alley, without any means of livelihood and reduced to a state of object poverty and utter economic destitution. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, whose family had been closely associated with the Moghal court, but who had earlier decided to take up the service of the British- was deeply touched at this schism of their soul. He applied his mind to the task of creating conditions in which his community could make up leeway. Ultimately, he found in education the panacea of all the ills of the contemporary Muslim society. He gave his attention to almost every thing- literature, religion, social life and education- and left a deep impact of

his thought and personality on every thing that he touched. He thus, became a social and moral force which accelerated the process of transition from the medieval to the modern age. The Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College was an instrument for the realisation of his scheme of social reform and intellectual resurgence. He gave a new depth and a new dimension to intellectual activity of a whole generation. The corner stone of his thought was the development of a scientific attitude of mind which he considered to be a sine qua non for intellectual advancement and social progress. He firmly believed in dynamic moment of society, according to the need of the time; supremacy of ‘reason’ in all matters wordly and spiritual; liberty of conscience and freedom of expression; hard work and incessant struggle to catch up with the advanced countries; and concept of nation which overrode all parochial considerations.  

His ‘Tafseer of the Quran’ and his ‘Commentary on the Bible’, reflect two vital decisions: a rationalistic approach towards one’s own religion and sympathetic understanding of other religions as a pre-requisite to a healthy religious attitude. His edition of ‘Tareekh-i Firoz Shahi’, ‘Ain-i Akbari’ and ‘Tuzk-i Jahangiri’ drew attention to the need of critical study of the original source material for reconstructing the history of India. His ‘Asar-us Sanadeed’ laid the foundation of archeological studies in India. In 1886, he founded the ‘Scientific Society’, which undertook the translation of standard European works on science.

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2 Ibid., p. vi.
and history and started publication of journal 'Aligarh Institute Gazette'. In 1870, he started a monthly magazine 'Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq' which fought against conservatism and widened the intellectual horizon of Muslim community. It also established the traditions of journalism in Urdu. Despite his multifarious engagements, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan produced books on religion, history, politics, law, science, education, biography and archeology. Thus he created an intellectual and cultural centre at Aligarh in tune with the progressive spirit of the time. Recounting the impact of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan on his contemporaries, Maolana Azad, once observed:

"The centre of the circle was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan himself and he attracted round him some of the best intellect of the day. Perhaps no journal in India had ever such influence up on the mind of the generation as his 'Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq'. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan founded this journal after return from his English tour. He and his colleagues were its main contributors. In fact, this journal laid the foundation of modern Urdu literature and so develop the language that today it is capable of expressing the highest and most abstruse thought. Perhaps, there was not a single literary figure among the Muslims of the day who was not influence by his circle. The best Muslim authors of the modern age were nourished here. He had developed the new school of research, interpretation and reconstruction of Muslim thought. Though modern Urdu poetry was born in Lahore, it was hear that it found the atmosphere
most conducive to its growth. Poems of a new style were composed and
read at the sessions of the Mohammedan Educational Conference. This
was also the first forum of Urdu Oratory. All the important speakers of the
day were created or nurtured on this platform."

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was not only a literary genius, an outstanding
scholar, a revolutionary reformer and a pioneer of Western education among the
Muslims of India, but he was also an apostle of secularism and Hindu Muslim
unity. His whole life was a glowing example of large-hearted tolerance and
religious co-existence. In fact he went so far as to advise the Muslims that, "If the
giving up of cow slaughter will establish amity and friendliness among Hindus and
Muslims, then please do not sacrifice cows which is a thousand times better." He
regarded all the inhabitants of India as one nation. In his speech at Patana on 27th
January 1883, he said, "Please remember that the Hindu and Muslims are religious
terms. In fact all the inhabitants of India, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, are
by virtue of their residence one nation. The time is past when merely on the ground
of religion the inhabitants of one country could be regarded as members of two
nations." He believed that the Hindus and Muslims "form two eyes on the beautiful
face of India." The Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College established by him was a
true monument of his firm faith in religious co-existence, a fundamental tenet of
Islam.

3 Ibid., p. viii.
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had played the role of 'The Gandhi of 1857'. If the Muslims of India had accepted Sir Syed Ahmed Khan as their leader, today, there might be many more Muslim universities in India. Today there is very much need of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's Educational movement which he started after the Mutiny of 1857 to overcome all the educational problems and backwardness of Indian Muslims. Unnecessary wastage of money on the wedding ceremonies in Muslim families should be stopped and the same amount should be utilised to solve the educational problems of Indian Muslims.

This research work attempted to raise and discuss some of the key issues and problems confronted by Indian Muslims, particularly in the domain of education.

1. The Muslim educational system during the end of Muslim rule was challenged by the British in the mid-nineteenth century. In the beginning, the Muslims of India criticized and opposed and kept themselves away from the Western modern educational system, while the Hindus accepted and strived to acquire the Western education. Consequently, the Hindus began to progress economically and socially as they were the first to obtain status and position in the government offices. On the other hand, the Muslims, blinded by their narrow self-righteousness, sought to stop the clock of human progress.

2. Inability and unwillingness of the Muslims, even in the slightest degree, to change with the changing time and circumstances, they were overwhelmed by the galloping forces of decay. Moreover, after the great rebellion of 1857, Muslim
society began to deteriorate catastrophically. It was under such unhappy circumstances that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan took it upon himself to arrest the forces of decay within Muslim society and turn the tide in favour of progress. This was undoubtedly a formidable task, but Sir Syed Ahmed Khan answered the call of the time by unfurling a flag bearing the inscription “Educate, Educate, Educate”. This was due to the fact that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was convinced that education would cure all the social political disease. He held these views because: to him the intellectual and moral decline of his community was an even more serious fortune that the loss of political power are material resources; and he looked upon a sound system of education as an effective instrument of intellectual renaissance.⁴

3. After the Mutiny, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan decided to turn his attention to the betterment of his community. He was well aware that in no period of their long history were the Muslims so unenlightened and backward as in the later part of the 19th Century. Commenting on this situation, he remarked that, “My unfortunate co-religionists are ..., lying at the bottom of the path of ignorance.”⁵ Adding that, “If this states of affairs were allowed to continue for any length of time, their mental melody would become incurable.”⁶

It is interesting to observe that he talks of, “Ignorance” and “Mental Malody” rather than of lost political power. It was the intellectual degradation or

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⁴ Evanse Brothers, Muslim Education In India. London, 1934. p. 810.
⁶ Ibid., p. 189.
retrogression of the Muslims that was a source of great pain to him.

Hence, it was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's firm conviction that, as long as the Muslims did not acquire modern education, they would remain backward. Speaking in the meeting of the Muslim Literary Society in October 1863, he stated:

"The reason, gentleman, why we are so backward is that whilst we are learned in an benefited by the philosophy, Sciences and the arts of the antiquity, we are almost entirely ignorant of those of modern times." 7

4. Continuing, he wondered, "Is it any prejudice that prevent us from doing so?" 8 Thus, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan hit the nail on his head. The source of the problem had been located. Like a trained physician, after diagnosing the disease he was ready to write the prescription. He had already decided that, unless Muslims availed themselves of the fruits of Western Sciences and arts, they would remain in their same wretched state, and that a change, if there should by any, would be for the worse. Therefore, he set out to determine the causes of Muslim prejudice against obtaining modern education. A committee was instituted for this purpose. After a comprehensive study the committee reported that:

"It may be stated briefly that the causes which have kept the Muslims aloof from English education may be traced to force sources ... to their political

7 Ibid., p. 74.
8 Ibid., p. 75.
traditions, social customs, religious beliefs and poverty.”

5. Now that the source of the disease had been located and accurate diagnosis of the causes made, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (like an able physician) set out to prescribe the cure. Henceforth, his efforts were directed towards establishing a Muslim college, where Muslim children could acquire modern as well as religious education. Subsequently the college was established in 1877.  

6. However, it seems pertinent to point out that during the establishment of the college, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was faced with opposition from the Ulema. The following invective by a religious divine is indicative of the ferocity of the forces of opposition Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had to contend with:

“No assistance is allowable to this institution, may God destroy it and its founder. No Muslim is allowed to give assistance to or countenance the establishment of such an institution. It is, moreover the duty of the faithful to destroy it and chastise to the utmost those who are friendly with it.”

7. Subject to such violent abuse and threats, most of them would likely have succumbed, but Sir Syed Ahmed Khan remained undeterred. He continued to go forward with increasing confidence. Subsequently, in 1920, the college was raised to the rank of university due to the persistence efforts of the Muslim Leaders like Agha Khan III, Raja of Mahmudabad and H. Billgrami.

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10 Hali Altal Husain, Loc. cit., pp. 633-634.

11 Rahaman F., Muslim Modernism In Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent. Lahore. p. 82.
8. The Aligarh college eventually succeeded in achieving most of its objectives. It gave opportunity to Indian Muslims to acquire knowledge in the modern and scientific domain. Moreover, the qualification obtained from the Aligarh college opened the doors to the official jobs, status and identity of Indian Muslims. In addition, it ameliorated the economic conditions of Muslims and helped them to recover from the post-1857 misfortunes.\(^{12}\)

9. One of the major objectives of the college was to infuse, defuse and harmonise the best elements of knowledge of both East and West- Scientific as well as religious. Further, his new system of education was not to be a mere imitation of the West: instead, it was productive assimilation of both East and West. It was not a mere adaptation. In short, it was an attempt at a grand synthesis of the knowledge of the East and West. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan realised that the new age was the age of Science and if Islam was to meet the challenge of the new age, there was a need for re-interpretation of Islam. Hence by establishing the college he visualised the education of the Muslims who would have, “Quran in one hand, Modern Science in other and on his head the Crown of‘ there is no God, but Allah’.\(^{13}\)

10. It is interesting to note that the passionate attempt of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to reconcile the religion of Islam was considered by a few Muslims as the

\(^{12}\) Mohammad Sadique, *A History Of Urdu Literature.*


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 270.
result of Mu’Tazilah thinking. One of the critics concluded his evaluation by stating that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was close to Mo’tazilah in rationalizing the Quran to Modern Science.\textsuperscript{14}

11. Due to the opposition from Muslim community from various parts of the world, he could not bring his own rational approach of religion into the Aligarh college.

12. As for the personal service of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to his people, it is not so insignificant either. It can be said that when the Muslims of India were on a steady course of decline, with seemingly little to hope for, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan came to their rescue. His awareness of the existing state of affairs and his apprehensions of the dangers that threatened the future of his people made him do something to alleviate their condition. The proposed panacea from Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was education - more specifically modern education, which to him was synonymous with Western education.

13. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan made continuous efforts to fight against traditionalism and religious fanaticism. He subjected social conventions not to mere cynical persiflage, but to serious criticism of reason. As such he was partially successful in obtaining acceptance of modern science and literature as an essential part of Muslim education.

\textsuperscript{14} Aligarh Muslim University- Contribution and Achievements.

14. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan envisaged to harmonise the two paradigms of knowledge i.e. secular and religious. The Aligarh college contributed significantly to the socio-political uplift of the Muslim community in India. The sparkling achievements demonstrate the Aligarh Muslim University played a very beneficial role at a time when Muslims in India had seemingly little to hope for. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan came to rescue the Muslims from further deterioration. They frankly told the Muslims that the past was dead and gone and that the present was in ruins; but reassured them that there was something ahead to hope for. Hence, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and other Muslim leaders succeeded in preparing Indian Muslims for their bright future.