Chapter II

Sir Syed’s Works on Religion and Theology
Syed Ahmad Khan was a prolific writer. His written legacy is enormous. His writings are in various forms like books, articles, booklets, letters, etc. His pen travelled over an immense field of knowledge, and produced books on a number of issues, ranging from religious matters to reformative and literary subjects. His initial writings are mostly on historical and literary subjects. But later, with the launching of his socio-religious and educational reform movement, he wrote mostly on matters related to the intellectual and educational regeneration of Indian Muslims. That is the main reason why his later books are predominantly religious and reform-oriented. His important works are briefly introduced below.

1. Jilā' al- Quṭub bi Zikr al- Mahbūb

It is the first piece of religious writing by Sir Syed in 1841 A.D. This booklet is a Maulud writing [A biography of the Prophet to be recited at the customary gatherings commemorating the birth of Muhammad (SAW)]. Sir Syed had a great desire that essential teachings about Prophet Muhammad should reach up to the general public. Indian Muslims celebrate monthly gatherings of Milad. There were several Maulud books in Sir Syed’s time which the devout read with faith. Sir Syed wrote his book "Jilā' al- Quṭub" with the aim to narrate the correct and well proved happenings. In this booklet he describes the event of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, his different
names, structure, character and his Sahaba particularly Ashra Mubashshirah, domestic animals, small weapons, miracles and the last sermon (Hujjat al-Wida).

Nevertheless the booklet has a special section entitled "Majazat", in which a number of miracles of the Prophet Muhammad are enumerated. This section ends with the observation that the miracles of the Prophet were too numerous to enumerate.¹

Apart from a short Persian poem in praise of the Prophet at the beginning of this tract and one in Arabic at the end, it is written throughout in idiomatic Urdu prose. Sir Syed declares at the end of it to have made use of a maulud risala entitled "Surur al-Mahzun", by Shah Waliullah, and to have taken a few things from "Madarij al-Nubuwwah", the copious biography of the Prophet (SAW) by Abdul Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi. He further states that a certain Maulana Nur al-Hasan corrected and improved upon his tract.²

2. Tuhfa - i - Hasan

This is in fact an urdu translation of the two chapters of the Persian work "Tuhfa - i - Ithna Ashariyya", Shah Abdul Aziz's scholarly work on Shiism. This translation is the only work in which Sir Syed criticized the Shias or tried to refute their accusations.

Sir Syed was so influenced by the book Tuhfa - i - Ithna Ashariyyah of Shah 'Abdul Aziz that he translated its 10th and 12th
chapters. The tenth chapter (*Mata an Ashab - i - thalathah*) focuses on the charges levelled on *Ashab - i - thalathah* and the mother of the believers Hadrat Aishah; and the twelfth chapter deals with the Shia term "*Tawalla and Tabarra*" (meaning love, and the enmity of one's neighbour on religious grounds, respectively) Sir Syed writes:

"*Tuhfa - i - Ithna Ashariyya* is the best gift for Muslim Ummah. So I translated it in a very easy language into urdu, under the titled *Tuhfa - i - Hasan*".  

In the compilation of this treatise he was supervised by his teacher Maulana Nurul Hasan. Sir Syed has referred to this fact thus: "Allah's peace be upon my teacher Maulvi Muhammad Nurul Hasan, who instructed and guided me when I decided to translate it. The translation was completed under his supervision".

This treatise was first published in 1843 AD and secondly in *Tasaneef - i - Ahmadiya*, first part, in 1883 AD.

3. Kalimat al- Haq

This tract published in 1849 A.D deals with "*Piri-Muridi*". It is written in a simple, direct and idiomatic style. The author aims at a wide audience. The first part discusses the notion of *piri*. He says that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the one valid *pir*, and that therefore all organized Sufi life must be strictly directed to following the Prophet alone by adhering closely to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. He was also of the opinion that religion of Islam was completed in every aspect in the
The period of Prophet Muhammad and it is not only wrong but a sin to include in it any thing more. The second part of this tract on murid discussees mainly the concept and practice of bai'.'

Sir Syed's view on pir - muridi, exemplifies what Syed Ahmad Khan means by the concept of personification of all Shari'ah law in the life and practise of Muhammad, In this spirituality the mystical path (tariqah) is seen as being identical with the way of Shari'ah law, thereby holding that there was no difference between tariqah - i - Muhammadiyah and Shari'at - i - Muhammadiyah. According to him, there is one true pir — Muhammad (SAW). Any other can be pir only in the measure in which he conforms to the pir. To be a murid is to be faithful to Muhammad and his Sunnah, radically and whole heartedly.

Commenting on a tradition where the Prophet addresses Hadrat Anas bin Malik thus: "O my son, the one who has cherished my sunnah, without doubt he has cherished me, and he will be with me in Paradise," Sir Syed, writes:

"O Muslims, reflect a little, even if a thousand souls would sacrifice themselves for this word "with me", it would still be little! To be together in Paradise with the Apostle of Allah is such glad tidings that verily both worlds have no value. Whatsoever in comparison with that reality! What a good fortune the person enjoys who is granted to be with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Alas, where do you err wandering around? Whatever gracious gift (ni'mat) there is, it is in the Sunnah of the Prophet, by God, in nothing else, in
nothing else, in nothing else.\textsuperscript{7}

Thus true sanctity lies in a complete dedication to the enactment of the sunnah. This conformity should be total, comprehending all aspects of life and involving the entire being of the believer. The Shari'ah should become the sole object of his desire and concern.\textsuperscript{8} Such dedication becomes easy if the Shari'ah is seen as nothing but the Prophet's practice of Islam. Because, as the tradition says, \textit{man ahabba sunnati faqad ahabbani} (who loves my sunnah, loves me), and therefore the endeavour to follow his sunnah becomes an act of personal love for the Prophet.

Total conformity to the sunnah implies the avoidance of innovation in any sphere of life. It is satan who calls to ways other than that of the sunnah. There is no other way to reach God but the sunnah of the Messenger of God. Sir Syed insists:

Our point is this, do not make every conjurer and juggler your pir, do not go for his charms and miraculous powers but consider only that person a wali, ghauth, qutb and abdal \textsuperscript{9} who is a follower of the Muhammadan sunnah, although he may not perform even one miracle.... The only sign of a saint is whether he follows the sunnah and Shari'ah of the Messenger of God.\textsuperscript{10}

His discussion of the practice of taking oath of allegiance (bai'h) to a pir in a Sufi order again shows Sir Syed's concern about leading people back to the pure practice of early Islam. With regard to the legality of this practice he writes:
If somebody in order to avoid sins and to follow the *sunnah* of the Messenger of God, in order to repent and to ask the forgiveness of his past sins—having in mind only the *sunnah* of the messenger of God—gives his allegiance to some good natured, educated and learned person, then there is no objection to that, it is rather in accordance with tradition and (therefore) commendable. But (the practice of) becoming a *murid* of such and such a *silsilah* has no *asl* (no foundation on the *Qur'an* and *sunnah*). Is *bai'h* not basically repentance (*taubah*)? To say therefore: we have repented in this or this sufi family or order does not make sense at all.¹¹

Syed Ahmed Khani dismisses any kind of mediation, such as the intercessory power of a *pir* in life, in the hour of death, or after death, as pure error. Crucial is the believer's personal response:

> You must but right your book of (good) works (*Namah - i - āmāl*). That will come in useful (when you are) in your grave as well as on the Day of resurrection. On that day God will do you justice..... Only this one question will be asked: “Speak up, what have you brought goodness or badness? Have you practiced the following of the Messenger of God or not? Through God’s grace alone, then, is there salvation of both *pir* and *Murid*.¹²

Concerning the practice of *dhikr*, so central to sufi piety, Sir Syed concedes that there is a form of it that does not contravene the *sunnah*. He suggests, nevertheless, that if a man could centre his whole attention on performing the prescribed ritual prayer (*namaz*), “he would gain such a (high) station at the court of Allah as can neither be reached by *dhikr* or any other devotional practice. For that reason”, he
concludes, "one of the great men of the sunnah has said, 'Ritual prayer is the mi'raj for the faithful'. The special kind of "awareness of God's presence" which, according to some, can only be achieved by dhikr and devotional practices, is in fact reached by an intense and exact performance of ritual prayer.

However, Sir Syed does not want to abolish piri – muridi and the devotional practices that go with it, he rather wants to place them in a right perspective, reforming them thoroughly:

In short, do not forsake the sunnah of the messenger of God. If you become a piri become one in accordance with the sunnah alone, if a murid, then in accordance with the sunnah alone. Be ready in the service of the elders and opt for the affection of the one who is obedient to the sunnah, so that you may be blessed with good company (suhbat) and may, at the same time, be fully obedient to the sunnah. Because good company has a tremendous impact on you... The perfect murid, in the final analysis, is the one who keeps to the way of God all the rest is idle talk.13

The most significant teaching of kalimat al-Haq is that the following of the tariqah - i - Muhammadiyya must be identical with the faithful implementation of the Shari'at - i - Muhammadiyya, and vice versa.
4. Rah - i - Sunnat dar Radd - i - Bid'at

This treatise was published in 1850 A.D. It comprises 16 pages. The name of this treatise clarifies that it was written in favour of sunnah and in criticism of bid'at.

Sir Syed has also written a review on Rah - i - sunnat in 1879. He tells us that in its basic approach the treatise follows Idah al- haqq al-sarih fi ahkam al- mayyit w'al- darih (Elucidation of the plain truth concerning the rules about the dead and the tombs), Shah Muhammad Ismail’s tract in Persian. A comparison of the two works shows that Sir Syed has adopted Shah Ismail’s analysis of the term bid’at, and some of his exemplifications. Yet the introduction and the second half of the work are mainly Sir Syed’s own composition. There is the same lucid Urdu prose, and the effort to reach a wider readership, as in Kalimat al- Haq. The immediate cause for writing this tract was an interesting exchange of views Sir Syed had (in one of the meetings at the house of Sadr al- Sudur Maulana Muhammad Sadr al- Din Azurdah). Over the licitness of eating mangoes, Sir Syed had defended his views, saying that to eat mangoes though not a blameworthy action was a matter of doubt, since the Prophet had not decided upon it explicitly, having himself never eaten them. “I swear by God in whose hands rests my life”, stated Sir Syed, “If a person does not eat it then the angels will kiss his feet at his (death) bed”. In 1879, he recalls that “this I had said with utter conviction
and much fervour. The maulana listened to it and remained silent. It was at this period of noisy and tumultuous Wahhabism that after the discussion just recorded I wrote this tract.\textsuperscript{15}

The argument Sir Syed had in Mufti Sadr al-Din's majlis over the lawfulness of eating mangoes shows the kind of questions disturbing Sir Syed's conscience in the early 1850's. What he was later to be called his "leaning towards Wahhabism" \textsuperscript{16}, was basically his search for the authentic practice of the Prophet, and his determination to imitate it. Along with many contemporaries of that time, he became more and more aware of the gulf between Islam (as he conceived of it in its original purity) and the then state of Islamic practice of India. A natural result of this was his effort to define the concept of \textit{bid'at}, and to measure contemporary Islamic practice by what the great schools of Islamic law would regard as the \textit{sunnah} of the Prophet.\textsuperscript{17}

In his introduction to \textit{Rah - i - sunnat}, he criticized the religious life of Muslims of those times. They mixed some innovations in their practices and beliefs. So he felt that it was important to remind them the true concept of \textit{sunnah}. Sir Syed clarified that they could get their salvation only by fulfilling the command of Allah and by following the \textit{sunnah} of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).\textsuperscript{18}

Further, he also stated that to be a good Muslim and to reach salvation it was essential to avoid innovation from their beliefs and
practices. In Kalimat al-Haq, Sir Syed has defined bid'at in vague terms as "something new". But here, he distinguished three main types:

"The belief, spoken word, state of heart, worship, custom or transaction that is new. New, that is to say: neither the thing itself nor anything else similar to it existed at the time of the Messenger of God and, neither the thing itself nor anything similar to it existed at the time of the companions and the followers of the companions and the followers of the followers. If any person does such a thing because he regards it as harmful (on that day) or if any person practices something because he regards it as an essential element or a condition or necessary part of a certain worship or of a transaction (mu'amalat) then this is called "pure innovation (thet bid'at).\(^{19}\)

Shah Ismail defines this as bid'at - i - asliyah (genuine innovation).

The second kind of innovation took place with changes in the order of things as prescribed in detail in the law. It referred to things and matters in themselves praiseworthy, but not necessary for the action concerned to be counted valid, like prescriptions regarding the positions of the body during ritual prayer.\(^{20}\) This Shah Ismail defines as bid'at - i - wasfiyah (descriptive innovation).

The third kind of innovation concerned religious matters or practices neither explicitly prescribed nor forbidden things which did not belong to the distinctive marks of Islam. These become innovation because the effort spent on their practice was the same as that on putting into practice the distinctive marks of Islam.\(^{21}\) Shah Ismail defines
this as bid'at - i - hukmi (virtual innovation).

5. Namiqa dar Bayan masala - i - Tassawwur - i - Shaikh

This risala, written in 1852 AD, supports the Naqshbandi practice of visualizing the spiritual mentor as a means for spiritual progress. In 1852 AD, a few Naqshbandi elders, perhaps disturbed by Sir Syed’s earlier condemnation of the practice of Tasawwur - i - Shaikh (the practice of visualizing within, the image of one’s spiritual guide, thus achieving union with him), had urged him to write in its defence. Accordingly Sir Syed wrote a Namiqah in Persian language 22, in which he endeavoured to show the Tasawwur - i - Shaikh being an apt adept.

To corroborate his view he states that Shah Ismail, despite what he wrote in Sirat al - Mustaqim, did not cease practising Tasawwur - i - Shaikh till his death.

Without Tasawwur - i - Shaikh, claims Sir Syed, he would not have found the way to God, or the protection of the messenger. The practice anyway, is taken from the Companions and followers and many former Shaikhs of the order have reached by practicing Tasawwur - i - Shaikh the stages of fana fi al- rasul.23

6. Kimiya - i - Sa'adat

This is an urdu translation of Imam Ghazali’s Kimiya - i - Sa’adat. Sir Syed translated the preface and three chapters of the Kimiya - i - Sa’adat on the saying of the sufi Alim Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki. In
this book emphasis has been made on the point that man is the best of the creations. He should seek the desire of Allah by his virtues by hook and by crook. This risala was first published in 1883 in Tasaneef - i - Ahmadiya Part I.  

7. Ta'am Ahl - i - Kitab

Whether Muslims could share meals with the non- Muslims, specially the ahl - i - kitab was a question often asked and debated among theologians. Sir Syed was also asked the same question by someone who perhaps wanted to know his views regarding the eating of meal with the Britishers. Muslim theologians generally disliked eating with non Muslims. Sir Syed's answer was however categorically affirmative. He wrote in the society's Gazette, in September 1866 that according to the Qur'an and the traditions, it was quite lawful for them to do so. He wrote:

"It was not by blindly following my parent's example, but by carrying out my own investigations that I came to the conclusion that Islam is the greatest and truest religion of all. Moreover, this true religion has taught me to act and talk with sincerity. The person who says one thing and does another is indeed a mean creature, but the worst of all is the person who, even though he understands the dictates of Islamic law, hesitates to act in accordance with them because he does not wish to be cut out of step or because he fears the criticism of others. Therefore, I have never hesitated to eat and drink with English people. So long as wine and pork have not been included in the meal. My English friends often visit my house,
and I theirs. We share the same table and eat from the cloth. What we are not ashamed to do before God, we should not fear to do before our fellow men.25

Although Sir Syed had been eating with his British friends for some time, it had never occurred to him to publicize the idea. When he realized that “one man’s example was not enough to free everyone from the shackles of customs and traditions and that the Muslims would never lose their fear of the British nor their suspicion and hatred of the Muslims until both peoples came together and established some kind of social basis for learning about each other’s way of thinking”, he published a separate booklet on the topic entitled “Risala Ahkam - i - Ta’am - i - Ahl - i - Kitab”.26

By quoting verses of the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet together with the opinions of some great theologians including Shah Abdul Aziz, to prove that it was perfectly in order for Muslims to do as he had done himself and eat in the homes of the English, food prepared by them, in their own utensils, providing that no pork or wine was included in the meal.27 He went to remove all the doubts which had been raised by the Indian Ulama about the lawfulness of eating with the ‘people of Book’ and which had caused other Muslims to refrain from eating anything cooked in English homes. His arguments were good enough to convince any fair-minded individual of their validity.
8. Tabyin al-Kalam

When Sir Syed was in Bijnor (1855 – 57), he wrote a number of articles defending Islam against missionary criticism. Thereafter particularly after the events of 1857, he realized the need to interpret the Bible in the light of the basic principles of Islam.

For this purpose, according to Hali, Sir Syed utilized his whole earnings and money which he received from the government by way of compensation for the salary he had not drawn during the mutiny and for the property he had lost in Bijnor. He purchased all the books he needed on Christianity, Biblical commentaries and works dealing with unitarianism. He also made a collection of books written by atheists attacking the Bible. He even employed a person who knew English and an Arabic scholar. However, before he could start his work, he was transferred to Ghazipur. But he did not forego his project. He brought his own press, to Ghazipur. In order to learn Hebrew he employed a Jew.

According to Hali, Syed Ahmed’s main aim behind writing a commentary on the Bible was “to go straight to the source of Christian religion- the Bible and its teaching, the revealed scriptures and explain them in terms of Islam, the final revealed religion. This task, instead of discussing select themes (as the previous commentaries had done) presupposed his acceptance of Biblical text as being of a special revealed nature. Besides, Sir Syed was willing to share the Christian
experience of the Bible as a revealed word. And finally, he assumed that
the Biblical text of Jews and Christians are generally reliable and are
not, in their present form, so corrupt that they do not merit serious
considerations by Muslims. Here lies the main difference between Syed
Ahmed's stand and that of Ijaz - i - Isawi. Sir Syed is prepared to accept
Christian's scriptures as relevant to the Muslim’s own faith, as
revelation, on to the final revelation in the Qur'ān”.

_Tabyin al- Kalam_ was published in two volumes. The first volume
appeared in 1862 and the second one in 1865 AD. The first volume
deals with the basic issue of the authenticity of the Bible and its place in
Islam. However _Tabyin al- kalam_ is not a literal translation of the Bible. It
is more of a paraphrased rendering of the Bible. In the first volume Sir
Syed added a few essays which deal with (Chapter I) “necessity of the
coming of Prophets to save mankind”; (Chapter II) “the revelation and
the word of God”; (Chapter III – V) the question of the identification of
holy books mentioned in the Qur'ān with the various books of the Bible,
and of the faith Muslims have in them; (Chapter VI) the methods with
which Muslim theology establishes the reliability and authenticity of
these books; (Chapter VII – VIII) the question of the corruption of the
Bible and the identity of the present text with the original copies (_asli
nuskhe_); (Chapter IX) the translations; and finally (Chapter X), the
question of abrogation. The two appendices offer an elaborate table of
Biblical events and a comparative calendar of the Christian and Hijri
eras. The thrust of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in these essays is to point out that it was as essential for Jews and Christians as it was for a Muslim to believe that the Prophets had been sent by God and that the writings of the Old Prophets are accorded the same importance by Islam as they are by the other two religions.

The second volume of *Tabyin al- Kalam* contains a commentary on Genesis I – XI, with an introduction to both the Old Testament as a whole and to the books of Genesis in particular. The actual commentary is laid out with the Biblical text printed in the original Hebrew, along with an interlinear Urdu translation. This is followed by an English rendering. The opposite column contains parallel text from the Qur’ān and Hadith in the Arabic original, with again an Urdu interlinear translation and a subsequent English rendering. The margin indicates parallel references from the Bible, Qur’ān and Hadith. This presentation is clearly separate from the actual *tafsir* and from the often detailed doctrinal discussion on the basic concepts of Christian and Muslim theology that are thought to be connected with the passage in question. For these Jewish, Christian and Muslim commentaries are used.

There is no access to the original addition of the third volume of *Tabyin*, i.e., the commentary on Matthew (Chapter 1-5). The text in use, however, is the second volume of the *Tasaneef - i - Ahmadiyah* (1887), which reproduces only Urdu of the first edition, along with quotations
from the Qur'ān and Hadith appearing in the Arabic original. This third volume is prefaced by a short history of the Christian religion until the emergence of the Muslim religion, also in Urdu.

9. Khutbat-i-Ahmadiya

*Khutbat-i-Ahmadiya* is one of the key works of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. It comprises twelve chapters or essays (i.e. *khutbat*) which discuss the various aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad. This work of Sir Syed is special and therefore needs special attention because of several reasons. Not only that it depicts and expresses many key ideas of the author with regard to various religious issues, he had taken great pain and labour to write it. As we all know he travelled to Britain in order to collect material for the book.\(^\text{30}\)

The main objective of the book was to clear the “misconceptions” about some anecdotes of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) created by the publication of some works by European authors. The immediate provocation, however, came from the recently published book by William Muir’s *The Life of Mahomet*. Sir Syed collected notes and material for the book in England but was worried about the cost of its publication keeping in view his limited resources. Hali has mentioned the mental status of Sir Syed and his worries in his biography in detail. The book was first published in a summarized form translated into English. Thereafter, he revised the whole work from his notes, and had it
carefully printed in Urdu along with another work, entitled *Tasaneef - i - Ahmadiya*, giving more space to each subject than he had previously done in the English version. But since only a few copies of the *Khutbat - i - Ahmadiya* were printed, its circulation remained extremely limited.\(^{31}\)

*Khutbat - i - Ahmadiya* is not a systematic biography of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Nor was it Sir Syed's aim to write a systematic and detailed biography as does a biographer. His aim was rather to show that Islam and its greatest exponent, Prophet Muhammad, (SAW) set the highest standards of humanity and its values. Islam is not a retrograte and unscientific religion opposed to progress and advancement of civilization as depicted by European and Christian authors on Islam. It is rather a religion which boosted the movement of progress and social justice- these are the all pervasive and common theme of all of Sir Syed's work and are found in this work too.

The twelve essays are as follows.

1. The Historical Geography of Arabia.

2. The Manners and Customs of the Pre-Islamic Arabians.

3. The Various Religions of the Pre-Islamic Arabs, wherein it is inquired to which of them Islam bears the closest Resemblance and whether by such affinity Islam is proved to be of Divine Origin or "A Cunningly Devised Fable".

4. The Question Whether Islam has been Beneficial or Injurious to the
Human Society in general and to the Mosaic and Christian Dispensation in particular.

5. The Mohammedan Theological Literature.

6. The Mohammedan Traditions.


8. The History of the Holy Makka, including an account of the distinguished part enacted in connection therewith by the Ancestors of Mohammed.

9. The Pedigree of Mohammad.

10. The Prophecies respecting Mohammed, as contained in both the Old and the New Testament.

11. Shaq - i - Sadr and Meraj, that is, the Splitting (open) of the Chest of Mohammed; and his Night Journey.

12. The Birth and Childhood of Muhammad.

The fourth essay of the Book, which is perhaps the most important, ponders over whether Islam as a religion was beneficial to human society. He starts this chapter by referring to the remarks of some European authors on Islam like Muir, Gibbon, and Davenport which show the Prophet in positive terms. But, thereafter, he goes on to refute the negative comments by the above mentioned authors in detail. He found precisely six issues on which European authors had
criticized Islam, namely (a) polygamy, (b) divorce, (c) slavery, (d) freedom, (e) that Islam was spread by the sword, and (f) tolerance. Refuting the charge of the encouragement of polygamy by Islam he says

"It is a great mistake to suppose that in Islam polygamy is made compulsory upon its followers, on the contrary, the general practice of it is not even recommended, the privileged use of it being reserved for such as for physical reasons may stand in need of it, but in the absence of such a excuse the indulgence in it is wholly contrary to the virtues and morality taught by Islam. Unfortunately, however, no small impediment is thrown in the way of a calm and candid investigation of the subject by the antagonism which exists between the manners, customs and modes of thought of one nation and those of another. Thus, the very word polygamy suggests to Christians ideas so offensive with minds almost predetermined to find in it nothing but an unmitigated evil, and without inquiring how far it may be justified by the requirements of climate, the comparative number of the sexes, and by various physiological and social reasons."

In short Sir Syed defends the practice of polygamy discussing it from three points of view, but refuses to accept that it was encouraged by Islam. It was rather a social requirement in his view.

As to divorce, he first enumerates its benefits to the society and mentions the difficulties of those Christian societies which do not allow divorce. It were these difficulties, point out Sir Syed that ultimately forced protestants to allow divorce. As regards the Islamic concept of
divorce, Sir Syed wrote:

“Our prophet neither underrated nor overvalued divorce. He constantly pointed out to his followers how opposed it was to the best interests of society; he always expatiated his disciples to treat women with respect in kindness, and to bear patiently their violence and ill temper; and he always spoke of those who availed themselves of divorce in a severe and disparaging manner. Notwithstanding, however, Mohammed’s rooted antipathy to divorce, he gave it the importance and consideration it justly claimed and merited. He allowed it under circumstances when it could not fail to prove a valuable boon; when it either entirely removed, or at least greatly alleviated, the cares, troubles, and embitterments of wedded life; and when if not taken advantage of, society would suffer still more than it already did. In such cases divorce is far from being a disadvantage to society; it is, on the contrary, a blessing and an efficient means of bettering the social condition”.

Similar treatment is given to other issues as well. He is particularly vehement about the charge “Islam spread by sword” theory. Quoting from Islamic ideas of Tawhid, equality, peace and justice and the practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the Pious Caliphs he shows that salvation was contrary to that.

A constant theme of Sir Syed in the book is to show the compatibility of Islam with Christianity and Judaism on the one hand and the interaction of these religions i.e. in his words “advantages” which Christianity and Judaism derived from Islam. He takes great pain to
show in this khutba that many ideas and precepts of Christianity in particular and protestantism and Judaism for which they feel proud were directly influenced by Islamic ones. He comments:

"No religion upon earth is more friendly to Christianity than Islam, and the latter has been to none, more beneficial and advantageous than to Christianity .... Islam fought against Judaism in favour of Christianity, and openly and manfully did it declare that the mission of John the Baptist was undoubtedly true, and that Jesus Christ was unquestionably "the word of God" and "the Spirit of God" what other faith, then, can pretend to have proved itself more beneficial to, and to have done more for, the cause of Christianity than Islam".  

10. Tahrir fi Usul - i - Tafsir

This book was first published in 1892. It consists of 62 pages. This book is essential in order to understand the religious thoughts of Sir Syed, particularly, his understanding of the Qur'an. Although this book was published towards the end of his life it contains all those ideas which he had been having since long. He writes himself in the beginning of the book:

"When the period of revolt (ghadar) passed away and whatever happened to the Muslim community too passed away, I realised the need to reform my community. I pondered a lot over it until I became convinced that in order to reform the Muslims religiously as well as materially they should be given education in modern sciences and arts in the same
language (English) which has been destined by god.... There was however no difference of opinion as far as the question of temporal and secular education was concerned. But whether this method [of giving education in English] was fruitful for religious reform was a matter of discussion. This problem confronted the Muslims even earlier, points out Sir Syed. The same situation occurred when Greek philosophy spread among Muslims and it shattered their faith and beliefs. Muslim intellectuals paid proper attention towards it and invented the science of kalam (*Ilm al-Kalam*) and defended the Islamic faith with Greek philosophy...... When I started giving modern education to Muslims in English language I came across the question that whether these sciences were against Islam as they are often told. I read Tafsirs to the extent I could and found that apart from those sciences which are related to literature every thing was either based on weak and forged relations (*da`if*, *mawdu`, *fudul*, *rawa`af*), or baseless stories (*Qasas - i - bi sar wa pa*).........., which are largely taken from Jewish sources..........  

In his own style then Sir Syed criticises the lack of depth in the works of medieval Tafsir writers.

"I then started paying attention towards the work of principles of Tafsir with the hope that they must have evolved certain principles of Tafsir writing that might have been based on Qur'ān or any other thing that cannot be questioned. But I did not find anything [in them] except that Qur'ān consists of this and this *Ilm*........ Even more comprehensive works of Tafsir did add nothing except the recognition of Surah as Makki or Madani...... "  

Disappointed from those, Sir Syed then goes to the Qur'ān itself whether it had any principles of its understanding and found out that
there was no difference or inconsistency between modern sciences on the one hand and the Qur'ān or Islam on the other.

In this book Sir Syed writes "it was my aim to write the preface of Tafsir only after the completion of *Tafsir al - Qur'ān* from the beginning to the end. In this preface I will apply all the principles that I applied during Tafsir writing. But it needs a lot of time period. That is why I applied the important principles and decided only after the completion of Tafsir, If God desires so".

Sir Syed's Tafsir is basically based on 15 principles which were published in the form of a *risala*. That is why Sir Syed named it *Tahrir fi Usul - i - Tafsir*.

11. *Tarqim fi Qissa Ashab - i - Kahf w-al Raqeeem*

This is a small book dealing with the Qur'ānic story of *Ashab - i - Kahf*. It was published in 1889. Explaining the reasons of writing this book, Sir Syed says:

"Of those stories mention in the Qur'ān, one is the story of "Ashab - i - Kahf w-al Raqeeem". This story was well known to the people of Arabia even before the Prophet. As is familiar with such tales, interesting and funny additions are made to this story as well with the passage of time. God has mentioned this story in the Qur'ān and has clarified its factual position. But the exegetical writers and historians amalgamated many other stories into this in such a manner in the writings of the Islamic period that these seem to be part of Islam which is not actually the fact. Islam in free from such
Sir Syed expressed regret that the Muslim Ulama and scholars except the Mautazilites wrote on this subject without any research, based solely on unauthentic sources. They never bother to go for research. Moreover, they have adopted a strange methodology to express a simple and self-explanatory saying in such a complicated fashion that they seem to be something extra-ordinary. In the same context, strange things have been included in the issue of Ashab - i - Kahf, which is proved wrong by the Qur'an.

12. Izalat - al- Ghain an - Zulqarnain

Izalat - al- Ghain an - Zulqarnain is a commentary on a portion of the Qur'an. This booklet was published in 1889. In this Sir Syed has discussed the story of Zulqarnain and Yajuj Majuj. Stating the objective of writing this book Sir Syed says:

"In this book I have decided to state the factual version of the story of Yajuj Majuj as presented in the Holy Qur'an, and tried to inquire into its originality..... I have decided to expose all the unauthentic additions and writings added to our books and exegetic writings regarding this issue in order to make the people aware of the factual position of the whole story."

According to Sir Syed Zulqarnain and Yajuj Majuj story is simple and unambiguously stated in the Qur'an but the exegetic writers have made it confusing. In this story, the wall that has been referred to in the Holy Qur'an is the Great Wall of China, which had been erected on the
border of China. It was erected by Chi Vang T Faghfur Chine.

At the end of the book, Syed Ahmad has copied Urdu translations of a chapter of Kirkaran of "Tarikh - i - Chini" which gives the detail regarding Chi Vang T Faghfur Chini.

13. Tafsir al- Jin w-al - Jan ala ma fi al- Qur'ān

This is a small book published in 1891. While discussing the words of 'Jin' and 'Jan' Sir Syed has tried to prove that Jin have no physical existence. They are not any creature (like human beings) which can be present in this world, but Jin refers to the group of people associated with the period of ignorance.42

He has noted one verse each from Surah Kahf, Surah Hijr and Surah Rahman where the word Jin and Jan has been associated with 'satan'. So in these places, Sir Syed has considered meaning of Jin and Jan equivalent to satan with which these words are associated in these verses.43

According to Sir Syed, during the ignorance period in Arabia, the word Jin was used for those barbaric people who during the night, used to attack on civil population and caravans and then used to hide. There also existed several superstitions about them. So even after they entered Islam; their false superstitions remained intact and that is why several verses were revealed to get rid of these superstitions.

Sir Syed was of the idea that the word Jin and Jan has been used
for several purposes in the Qur'ân. Sometimes it refers to satan (Iblis) and sometimes to barbaric people of ignorance period. And there is no clear mention of Jin as a separate creature.

14. Khalaq al- Insan ala ma fi - al- Qur'ân

_Khalaq al- Insan ala ma fi- al - Qur'ân_ was published in 1891 in which Sir Syed has interpreted some verses of the Holy Qur'ân regarding the creation of mankind and has discussed these verses in a rational and scientific way. Besides, he has also rejected the non-Islamic thoughts regarding the creation of mankind.

After discussing the faith prevalent among Muslims regarding human creation with rational and scientific outlook, Sir Syed discussed the thoughts of Darwin which were very popular in those days. He thought it important to evaluate these thoughts and rejected the evolution theory of Darwin due to the reasons given below:

"When, as a human being, we perceive the things present in the universe we see them according to the law of nature.... The second being emanates from the first, the third from the second and fourth from the third and so on. The second being from first is to some extent advanced. But because of this advancement the resemblance of the second being to the first one is not completely lost; rather resemblance of the two still exist." 44

From the above comments, it is evident that Darwin's theory impressed Sir Syed. But he did not accept it fully. According to him, it is
evident that in the course of evolution, early stages from the late stages. But this does not mean that during evolution, the whole appearance of creature will change. There may be difference between figure / shape and appearance of old and new human groups, but it is difficult that monkeys will become human beings during evolution. This thought created misunderstanding among thinkers, and the main cause of this deception is due to the false basis on which this theory of evolution lies.

According to Sir Syed, it is difficult to assess and calculate the life of the universe. He has tried to harmonize the Qur’anic verses with the laws of physiology and has supported Islamic view regarding the creation of mankind by rejecting the Darwinian Theory and thought.

15. Al-Dua w al-Istijaba

This risalah (treatise) was published in 1892 AD. In this brief risalah Sir Syed has discussed prayers (dua) and acceptance of prayers. He extracted and collected all those verses from the ‘Qur’ân’ that referred to it, in order to explain and establish its original meaning. He wrote an elaborate account of these sentences after detailed research. After thorough study of the matter, he concluded that the term does not mean what has been inferred by Muslims erroneously. After research he put forward the belief that prayer and their acceptance doesn’t mean that God may fulfil what He has been asked by man as per his desire and prayers (dua) but considers it as secondary duty and
depicts the conclusion of the prayers as the state of mind and heart which emerges out of sincere duties performed.

Sir Syed has made a comparison of some sentences with reference to his conclusion that *dua* and *nida* (calling voice) are identical terms, meaning calling God, leaning towards Him, considering Him Omnipresent, real Power and Creator. So the person who prays with this perspective gets acceptance and blessings in return. He has supported his stand with examples and developed the thought that ‘Dua’ is one of the prayers, and that Allah has assured his people to accept every ‘Dua’. By drawing attention to the Qur’anic verse: نستعين (we worship none but thee, and we seek assistance from none but thee), He stresses the point that it is incumbent upon Muslims not to seek assistance from anyone other than Allah.

16. Azwaj - i - Mutahharat

This was the last treatise of Sir Syed which was published after his death in the Aligarh Institute Gazette in 1898. In this, Sir Syed refuted all the blames and charges put by European scholars regarding the polygamy of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Sir Syed felt very proud after writing this treatise and expressed his happiness. In one of his letters to Maulana Syed Mir Hasan, he writes,

"These days I am busy in the writing of a treatise on a very critical matter, i.e., wives of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). I hope after its publication there would be no doubt and
confusion on the topic".46

In this book he focuses on the lives of Hadrat Khadijah, Hadrat Sauda, Hadrat Hafsah, Hadrat Umm - i - Habibah, Hadrat Umm - i - Salmah, Hadrat Zainab and Hadrat Zainab bint Jahash. Main conclusions of Sir Syed as discussed in this book are:

(1) Muhammad (SAW) had more than one wife.

(2) Muhammad (SAW) had eleven wives. Hadrat Khadijah was his first wife and he did not marry anyone so long as she was alive.

(3) Nine wives of Muhammad (SAW) were alive after his death. Only Hadrat Aisha was the wife of Muhammad (SAW) who was not a divorcee and the remaining wives had been divorcees or widows.

The names of eleven wives are as follows:

1. Hadrat Khadijah bint Khuwailid.

2. Hadrat Saudah bint Zamah.

3. Hadrat Aisha bint Abu Bakr.


5. Hadrat Zainab bint Khazimah.


7. Hadrat Umm - i - Habibah bint Abi Sufiyan.

8. Hadrat Umm - i - Salmah Abi Umayyah.


11. Hadrat Juwairiyah bint Harith.

Apart from these eleven wives there were two more women in the Prophet's life who were not married by Nikah. However, Sir Syed was not sure of the number. They were either one or two. Generally, the historical records speak of one woman namely Mariya Qabtiya as the one who was in the marriage of the Prophet without Nikah. But some sources have mentioned another such woman namely Rayhana bint Sham'un. Interestingly, Sir Syed did not write in detail about these two women. He has mentioned both of them by the term "Saraya" which has no English equivalent but which can be explained as the women in marriage without Nikah.

As to why the Prophet Muhammad retained all his wives where as all other Muslims were asked not to marry in excess of four wives, Sir Syed has given an interesting argument. He writes:

"Any critic can ask why this Qur'anic injunction was revealed that no one should marry the wives of Muhammad (SAW) under any circumstance. If this prohibitionary injunction was not revealed then it would have lead to mass disturbances in the society because these women, because of their new husbands, would have tried to narrate hundreds of Hadith in accordance with, and to benefit, their new husbands." 47

Muhammad (SAW) could not divorce his wives because they were
not permitted to marry other persons. Sir Syed also quoted the Qur'anic injunction of *Surat al-Ahzab*,

"It is not lawful for thee
(To marry more) women
After this, nor to change
Them for (other) wives,
Even though their beauty
Attract thee, except any
Thy right hand should
Possess (as hand maidens)" (Qur'an, XXXIII: 52).

Regarding the polygamy of Muhammad (SAW) Sir Syed focusses on religious and political motives behind it. By marrying the women of different tribes, he sought political support in order to be able to preach Islam freely, because as per the tradition of the Arabs they used to give much regard and respect to their sons-in-law.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was particularly criticised for his marriage with Hadrat Zainab bint Jahash on the grounds that he himself desired to marry her, as he had fallen in love with her after seeing her once. Sir Syed refuted this charge and wrote that Hadrat Zainab was his cousin and did not use veil before him. So the above narration is totally baseless. He further writes that Muhammad (SAW) himself gave Hadrat Zainab in marriage to his slave and adopted son Zaid bin Harith. But after marriage due to some misunderstanding they separated. Muhammad (SAW) tried to settle the matter, but he could not succeed. Then Zaid bin Harith divorced her. As per the tradition in vogue among
the Arabs at that time, divorced women were looked down upon in society, and they were hardly remarried. It was also considered unlawful to marry the divorced wife of an adopted son. To stop this pre-Islamic tradition the Prophet married Hadrat Zainab on a clear instruction from Allah to that effect. The Qur'an says:

"Then when Zaid
Had dissolved (his marriage)
With her, with the necessary
(Formality), We joined her
In marriage to thee:
In order that (in future)
There may be no difficulty
To the Believers in (the matter
Of) marriage with the wives
Of their adopted sons, when
The latter have dissolved
With the necessary (Formality)
(Their marriage) with them.
And God's command must
Be fulfilled"⁴⁹ (Qur'an, XXXIII: 37).

Unfortunately, Sir Syed could not complete this treatise. He could not go beyond mentioning the circumstances of his marriage with Umm-i-Habibah bin Sufyan.

NOTES & REFERENCES


10. Ismail panipati, *op. cit.*, v. V, p. 275


14. He was the Mufti of Delhi and lived from 1789 to 1868.


23. C. W. Troll, *op. cit.*, p. 50


29. C. W. Troll, *op. cit.*, p. 70


44. Suraiyya Husain, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Aur Unka Ahad*, (Aligarh, 1993), pp. 175 – 76

45. Syed Ahmad Khan, *Al-Dua w al-Istijaba*, (Agra, 1892), p – 2


47. *Ibid.*, v. IV, pp. 233-234
