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Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Vision on Education

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ABSTRACT

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was great intellectual, a radical thinker, a keen historian, an enlightened and forward looking educationists. The western denomination which lasted until 1945 has crumbled and in its place a politically conscious new world has arrived to which the Muslim belong. In each type of Muslim society various types of revolution erupt which often passed the rubric of Islam. One such was globalization and modernization whose fire were stroked by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. In the long run this plan would prove to be a creative and decisively shape the societies of Muslim India. Sir Syed held the view that education was a means of fostering and cultivating the inherent potentialities of the child. He accepted that any method of teaching that makes the learner creative and constructive should be followed. He emphasized that for smooth functioning of education institutions, sympathetic, imaginative and democratic system of administration is essential. He believed that it would be easier for Indians to study different disciplines of studies through vernacular medium. On the whole, one can conclude that Sir Syed's vision on Education was a link between traditional and modern education. His educational ideas got practical shape in the form of Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College then rose to an academic institution i.e. Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Mubtalaa ye dard koi azu ho, roti hai aankh
Kis qadar jism ki hamdard hoti hai aankh

- Dr. Allama Mohammad Iqbal

An eye weeps when each and every part of our body is suffering; How sympathetic it is to the entire organism.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was and is like an eye to the Muslim community. He was worried if any of his fellow Muslim suffered. He took an oath to educate, reform and empower Muslims. He was gifted with a rare vision and far ahead of his times. He was a great intellectual, a radical thinker, an erudite theologian, a keen historian, an enlightened and forward looking educationist, an outstanding literary genius, an apostle of secularism and a Hindu-Muslim unity and a very distinguished architect of modern India.

Western education and science was not the only thing that Syed wanted to introduce to his co-religionists. The Muslim community in the nineteenth century was so strangled in social evils that social reforms was a necessity. Whenever any new thing was put to them they would refuse it on religious grounds. Hence, Syed, alongwith a new type of education, wanted to reform the society as he thought that the social evils were the root cause of Muslim degeneration. he, therefore, turned to cure the root cause and thought that the tree would itself flourish.

In England he studied the whole history of cultural development and noticed that in their reformation, two papers, The TATLER and the SPECTATOR (edited by Addison and Steele respectively) of the eighteenth century had played a major role. He planned to publish a similar paper to combat conservatism and give a new turn to the thinking of his community. Hence having reached India Syed Ahmad started a paper and named it Tahzib ul Akhlaq (Refinement of Manners) in which he attacked the social practices which hampered modern education among Muslims and told his co-religionists that Islam had never been opposed to the acquisition of any science and literature.

The next thing which Syed Ahmad wanted to know were the causes which prevented the Muslims from acquiring English education. He himself knew them but he wanted the Muslim community to speak themselves about it. he formed a committee on December 26, 1870 known as Committee Khwastgar Taraqi-e-Musalmanan-e-Hindustan i.e. "(the committee for the Better and Advancement of Learning Amongst the Muslims of India)". This committee was to study the causes which prevented the Muslims from availing of the advantages emitting from western education. The committee announced three prizes of Rs. 500/-, Rs. 300/- and Rs. 150/- I, II and III respectively. 25 articles (in some places 35 articles have been mentioned but Syed has written 25) were received by the committee.

Syed was opposed because of his religious ideas and the interpretation of the Holy Quran from modern angle. To meet the challenges of Christian Missionaries and to prove that Islam was not hostile to science, Syed started writing Tafseer-e-Quran (commentary of the Quran) with a new interpretation based on rationalism. Syed Ahmad believed in ijtihad (re-interpretation of religious concepts according to the urgency of the time). To face the challenges, a modern ilm-e-kalam was needed and Syed turned to it and interpreted the issues with the spirit of the age. Not caring the traditional approach he gave a 'liberal and progressive interpretation' on many popular concepts. This shows that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a great man. His mission was to change yourself according to need of the time.

Sir Syed Ahmad founded the All India Mohammadan Educational Conference to disseminate the message of the Aligarh Movement to every corner of the country.

The structure of western domination, which lasted until 1945, has crumbled, and in its place a politically conscious new world has appeared to which the Muslims belong. In each Muslim society different kinds of revolution erupt, which often pass under the rubric of Islam. The picture was indeed complex. One such revolution in "Muslim India" was that of modernization and globalization whose fires were staked by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. In the long run, this revolution would prove to be creative and decisively shape the Muslim societies in India, and indeed in the larger world of Islam.

Now the question arises how did the Muslims respond in the nineteenth century to the triumphant march of western civilization. The British East India company conquered Bengal in 1756, but it was not until after 1857 that the Muslims in India significantly responded to the cultural thrust of the west. Out of the internal dynamics of traditional Muslim Society appeared Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) who realistically grasped the challenge of modernization which British rule had brought to India. He led the Muslims to enter the stream of modernization through four avenues of reform: political, educational, religious and social like other pioneers of modernity in Asia and Africa, he used journalism to communicate with his fellow Muslims. His intellectual legacy is abiding, even though his tactics are no longer relevant. However, in order to appreciate his role it might be well to define modernization and globalization, its limitations and promises for Indian Muslim society.

Sir Sayyid grasped the challenge of modernity slowly, and appreciated its possibilities for the Muslims after his visit to Britain in 1869. During his formative years (1817-1857), which were mostly spent in Delhi, he remained a traditional Muslim, largely seeking validation of his convictions and behaviour by reference to generally established prescriptive Islamic norms. Sir Sayyid and the Muslim society in Delhi were exposed to mo-

dernity by virtue of their contact with the tiny British society and the modern Delhi college, which were established in Delhi with the advent of the British rule in 1803. The British rule not only introduced Delhi's citizens to a new subject culture, but also initiated a period of social mobilization which prepared the Muslims, especially after 1857, to accept the process of change from traditional to modern ways of life.

After the revolt of 1857, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan realized that the well-being future of fellow Muslims depended on two major factors i.e. western education and the ability to understand and mix freely with the British. he has worked compassionately for all these ideals but had come to the conclusion that his plans would be realized only when he visit to England himself.

At that time it was not so easy, for a man like Sir Syed, whose income was hardly sufficient for him to meet his expenditure in India. To make a journey to England was practically impossible for him. However, emphasizing his view on the point regarding his visit to England. He said, "All Indians should be encouraged to make a journey to Britain so that they get the opportunity of seeing for themselves the wonderful results of European civilization and witnessing the progress made by the European civilization. The Indians, only then will be able to understand how the British have become so rich, powerful and wise. He wanted to encourage the Indians to make the journey to Britain to have first hand information in connection with western education and development. He decided to visit Britain and for this he sold his library and mortgaged of his residence. He always insisted that his aims could not be fully accomplished until he had a thorough knowledge of principles and methods of education. However, he managed for the journey and left Banaras for England in April 1869, accompanied by his sons Syed Hamid and Syed Mahmood.

The Aligarh Movement

Since 1857 social reforms and English education among the Muslims were the cornerstone of Sir Syed's philosophy. The triumph of the English in 1857 had convinced Sir Syed of the inevitable thrust of their culture and education on Indians. Syed knew the opposition of the Muslims to both of these introduction Sir Syed said:

"No religious prejudices therefore with our learning any language spoken by any of the many nations of the world. From remote antiquity we have studied Persian, and no prejudice has ever interfered with the study of that language. How, then can any religious objection be raised against our learning and perfecting ourselves in English".1 He prompted them to accept the challenges confronting them and the key to meet and overcome these challenges was the unconditional acceptance of English education and western scientific ideas. By the acceptance of English education, he did not mean the avoidance of Islamic education. Both of them were to go simultaneously. To avoid confusion he repeatedly said,

"Philosophy will be in our right hand and Natural Science in our left, And the crown of "there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is His Prophet' will dorn our heads".2

He was convinced that the British nation had progressed because of education and unless the education of the masses was pushed on European lines, it was impossible for Indians to become civilized.

With all these good intentions, he reached England on May 4, 1869 and found the people, as expected, highly educated and cultured and he wrote to his friend Raja Jai Kishan Das. It is worthwhile quoting the letter in extensor. "What I have seen and see daily", he wrote, "is utterly beyond the imagination of a native of India. If any of my countryman do not believe what I say, you may certainly put them down as frogs and fishes. There was once a living fish that fell from a fisherman's net into a well in which were a number of frogs. When they saw a new traveler, white in colour, and glittering life silver, they believed very kindly to him, and asked where from he came. The fish said that he was a native of the Ganges. The frogs asked the fish if his watery country was similar to theirs to which the fish answered in the affirmative, adding that it was a bright, good country, swept by a fine wind, which raised waves in which fishes were rocked as in a swing, and disported themselves, and that it was very broad and long. On hearing this a frog came out a foot from the side of the well, and said "what I As long and as broad as the distance I have come from the well?" The fish said, "Much greater". The frog came another foot out, and again put his question to the fish, which said, "much greater". The frog went on, getting the same answer the further he went, until he got to the opposite side of the well. Asked the same question, the fish gave the same reply. The frog said, "you lie, it cannot be larger than this". Just at this moment a man let down a bucket and drew water thus causing small waves on the surface. The frog asked the fish if his country's waves were as large, on which the fish laughed, saying, "those things that you have never seen, and which it is impossible for you to imagine, cannot be thought of by you without seeing. Why, therefore, do you ask about them?"3

Sir Syed held the view that education was essential for all round development of human personality. Emphasizing the importance of education, Sir Syed said,

"The human soul without education is like a rough piece of marble, and unless the sculpture works on it and removes its roughness….. its good qualities remain hidden in it, and its fascinating shades, beautiful views… do not appear. The same is the condition of human soul. However gentle-hearted man may be, unless he is educated, all sort of good qualities and graces that are latent in him cannot emerge without the assistance of education".4

Emphasizing the importance of education, in one of his speeches, Sir Syed said, "it appeared to me that nothing could remove the obstacles to progress of Musalmans but education. And education, in its fullest sense, has been the object in furthering which I have spent the most earnest moments of my life, and employed the best energies that lay within my humble power".5

Delivering a speech on self-reliance in education, Sir Syed said, "it is regrettables as both the nations whose ancestors had been so enlightened and educated, defame the ancestors by their ignorance. Education is becoming widely popular these days. We have to think in the realm of education as to what subjects we should study and what is that the learning of which will not be useful to us".6

Sir Syed and Aims of Education

Sir Syed held the view that education was a means of fostering and cultivating the inherent potentialities of the child. He said that through education mankind individually and collectively, marched towards progressive development. Formulating the aim of education Sir Syed said, "the greatest aim of education and training is to engender piety, morality and humanness in human beings".7 He opposed the theoretical knowledge. He opined that education should aim at the harmonious cultivation of the physical, moral, intellectual and aesthetic sides of human nature.

Sir Syed's Proposed Curriculum

After considering the various needs and requirements of Muslim community, Sir Syed presented the details of his curriculum which can be categorized into two types –

1. General Education Curriculum
2. Special Education Curriculum

The general education curriculum was to meet the needs of Muslims – secular as well as spiritual. The special education curriculum as to enable the Muslims to benefit by the education system adopted by the government.

Method of Teaching

Sir Syed accepted that any method of teaching that makes the learner creative and constructive should be followed. He was not in favour of traditional method of teaching as it encouraged memorization and failed to prepare the child for the real life. According to Sir Syed learning by doing, observation, playing

and freedom of expression play an important role in methods of teaching. Sir Syed also recommended scientific and experimental method. He said "in old times, theories could be propounded and rebutted sitting in the sequestrated places, now it is the experimental age. To prove or disprove anything you have to be in the laboratories".8

Administration of Education

Sir Syed emphasized that for smooth functioning of education institutions, sympathetic, imaginative and democratic system of administration is essential. He held the view that Indians, especially, Muslims themselves should establish and administer their institutions of education in accordance with their needs and requirements without the interference of the government. Emphasizing his point of view, in a speech delivered at Gurdaspur in Punjab on January 27, 1884, Sir Syed said:

"Friends, I am of the opinion that no government can take the responsibilities of the education of the whole nation, and I firmly believe that it is not possible for the government to meet out fully the educational requirements of its subjects. Indian will progress only when they themselves, without the interference of the government and its officers, arrange for the education of their young boys out of their voluntary contribution, and themselves administer and control it".9

Medium of Instruction

He believed that it would be easier for Indians to study different disciplines of studies through vernacular medium. There is more or less consensus that medium of teaching should be mother tongue or the regional language. It will facilitate better learning. However, in this case, English should be studied as a link and library language. Since India is a multi-language country, the three language formula was developed and implemented to promote mother tongue and vernaculars.

To achieve the objectives of teaching through vernacular medium, Sir Syed established scientific society at Ghazipur in 1864 to provide Urdu translations of standard works and treatises on different subjects in the English language. The other objectives of the society, in the words of Sir Syed were …. "… all nations which once were civilized knew their sciences in their own language, and whichever nation tried to progress and civilize itself did so by translating all sciences into its own language. Therefore, the easiest and the most effective method for Indians to progress, and to progress is the result of the experiences of many various countries and of thousands of years, is that it should also try, by all possible means, to transfer into its own language all those sciences and arts which are now in the possession of foreign nations".10

In establishing the scientific society, Sir Syed had infact, renewed the tradition of love for knowledge of the early Muslims who, by the middle of 9th century, had translated the major work in Greek philosophy, mathematics, medicines etc. as well as Iranian and Indian thought into Arabic.

On the whole, we can conclude that Sir Syed's vision on Education was a link between traditional and modern education. His educational ideas got practical shape in the form of Mohammadan Anglo Oriental (MAO) college then rose to an academic institution i.e. Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).

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