

ISSUES OF HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN THE WORKS OF SYED AHMAD KHAN

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Abstract

Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadur (1817-1898) was a controversial Muslim figure in nineteenth-century India. In the first half of his life (pre-1857 Mutiny), he appeared to be an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity in India, but in the second half of it he was more concerned with Muslim religious and educational reforms and the promotion of Indian Muslim unity. His position such as on the Urdu-Hindi controversy raised issues about his views on Hindu-Muslim relations. The aspect of his life and thought that has bearing on Hindu-Muslim relations has received less attention from scholars compared to his reformist and modernist thought and agenda in the religious and educational sphere. Although he worked hard to promote Muslim unity, he sought to emphasize the approach of common religious and cultural values as a means of embracing 'others' in a spirit of fellowship and unity. He presented his unity message against a backdrop of troubled Hindu-Muslim relations and recurring communal riots during his time. The present study investigates Syed Ahmad Khan's inclusive vision of Hindu-Muslim unity and intercultural dialogue as a means to its realization as reflected in some of his literary works. It seeks to explain why he has espoused such a bold vision and how he intended to achieve the goal of Hindu-Muslim unity while acknowledging their religious and cultural differences. Highlighted in this discussion are the salient features of

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Hindu-Muslim relations prior to and during his time that influenced their later developments. This article also discusses the significance and relevance of his thoughts and ideas on Hindu-Muslims for contemporary India.

Keywords: Hindu-Muslim relations, education, national unity, British India, Indian National Congress and Syed Ahmad Khan

Introduction

This article is based on a study of four prominent Indian Muslim intellectual-activists, who lived during British colonial rule (1858 – 1947), concerning their thoughts on the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations and their practical responses to the issue. The intellectual-activists under study are Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadur³ (1817 – 1898), Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938), Abul Kalam Azad (1888 – 1958), and Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi (1914 – 1999). The main factor that inspired this study is the contemporary burning issue of Hindu radicalism and extremism in contemporary India that helps put Muslim-Hindu relations at their worst and most dangerous level since its independence in 1947 from colonial rule. It is extremely important that this disturbing phenomenon of Hindu radicalism and extremism that is directed at non-Hindu communities in the country, especially the Muslims, be fully understood and wisely addressed. The phenomena in question is fraught with dangers not only for India itself but also for other countries where Muslims and Hindus are found living together in large numbers. In fact, it has already generated serial communal violence and inflamed religious hatred against non-Hindu minorities resulting in numerous violent incidents that claimed in particular many Muslim lives and made them defenceless victims without due protection from the authorities. As part of our attempt to better understand the historical roots of present-day Hindu enmity against Islam and Muslims in India, our study seeks to investigate whether the life and thought of prominent Muslim intellectual-activists during British rule, particularly in their pertinence to Hindu-Muslim relations, might provide some pertinent

³ Hereafter, he will be cited as Syed Ahmad Khan.

insights into the issue.

This article is devoted to a discussion of Syed Ahmad Khan, the earliest of the four intellectual-activists under study, insofar as his views of and responses to the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations are concerned. In one historical respect at least, he is the most significant of the four. As a product of two cultural and intellectual worlds – the traditional Mughal culture and the modern culture of the Victorian era – he was perhaps the only Indian Muslim scholar of note to have earned this distinction. He had close connections with the Mughal court in Delhi with which several generations of his family had long been associated. He was also well connected to the British intelligentsia, first through the East India Company that played such an instrumental role in bringing to its end the history of Mughal rule itself and later, following the so-called Indian Mutiny in 1857 and soon after, the creation of the British Raj (1858), through the Colonial Establishment. Given his family's close connection to the Mughal Court, it was not a surprise that upon the death of his father in 1838, when he was just twenty-one years old, he received a job offer from the Mughal court. But for some reasons, he declined the offer. Instead he chose to enter the service of the East India Company as a clerk, which by this time was a de facto colonial ruler of a large part of the subcontinent, a decision protested by his family members.

Although he was an employee of the Company, he was not afraid to pen a book that laid the blame mainly on the British Administration for the 1857 Mutiny for having created widespread discontentment among the natives, both Hindus and Muslims that led to that bloody event. The book was titled *The Causes of the Indian Revolt (asbab-e-baghawat-e-hind)*.⁴ Since there was an interreligious dimension to the revolt as made clear by its author, this book may be revisited for the purpose of our present discussion of his thoughts on interreligious relations in India. Three religions were implicated in the revolt, namely Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Syed Ahmad Khan's perceptions of the impact of these three

⁴ The original work in Urdu was completed in 1858. But its English translation rendered by his two European friends was only published fifteen years later (1873). See Syed Ahmed Khan Bahadur, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* (Benares: Medical Hall Press), 1873.

religions in the genesis and eventual eruption of the Mutiny could help reveal what was then in his mind regarding their interactions in the British Raj.

Syed Ahmad Khan's life and thought⁵ has been extensively studied. However, the concentration in these studies has been on his religious and educational reforms and political thought, which appear to have been quite noteworthy in the context of Indian Islam of the nineteenth-century. These studies generally portray him as a Muslim modernist and a socio-religious reformer of his time. He appeared to be a sincere advocate of harmonious Hindu-Muslim relations in multi-cultural India of the nineteenth century, although, surprisingly, this aspect of his thought is rather little studied by contemporary scholars. Accordingly, this article seeks to examine this particular dimension of his thought, particularly as reflected in his book just cited as well as in some of his other writings.

Syed Ahmad Khan's Life and Works

Syed Ahmad Khan was born in Delhi, the Mughal capital, on 17th October, 1817 during the reign of Akbar Shah II (reign: 1806 – 1837), the second last Mughal Emperor. Belonging to the thirty-sixth generation of the Prophet's descendants, Syed Ahmad Khan came from a distinguished Muslim family that had close connections to the Mughal Court in Delhi. He grew up at a time when the Mughal Empire in effect had been reduced to the Red Fort in Old Delhi that served as the Emperor's main residence. What remained of the Empire was politically dying. Since the middle of the eighteenth century rebellious governors, provincial insurgencies and political intrigues of the British East India Company⁶ all helped facilitate the

⁵ For the life and works of Syed Ahmad Khan, see George Farquhar Irving Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (Oxford University Press, 1974). The original edition was published in 1885, thirteen years before Syed Ahmad Khan died. There are several other reprints before and after the Oxford edition. See also S. R. Sharma, *Life and Works of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (Book Enclave, 2009).

⁶ The Company became a full-fledged colonial authority following the success of its army led Robert Clive at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 in crushing a French-assisted local revolt led by Siraj al-Dawla. By colonial authority is meant that the Company took full administrative powers over its territories and it had the right to collect taxes from people living in these territories. Prior to that, by the 1700s the Company had

disintegration of the Empire with its last Emperor, Abu Zafar Bahadur Shah II (reign: 1837 – 1857) only to witness its final collapse and his humiliation at the hands of the Company's military force.⁷ In fact, like his father Akbar II, Bahadur Shah II was only an Emperor in name. He did not wield any power except within the walled City. In fact, the East India Company treated him as just a pensioner. His fate as the last Mughal Emperor was finally sealed when, in May 1857, the British proclaimed him as the leader of the Munity that was earlier mentioned, though recent studies show that he was forced by anti-British forces to bless the rebellion. In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion that ended with British victory, Bahadur Shah II was captured and imprisoned in Burma where he died in 1862, and the East India Company dissolved and the British Raj instituted on 28 June 1858. It was under the British Raj that Syed Ahmad Khan was to play a highly visible public role till his death.

Syed Ahmad Khan's family was noted for their literary and scholarly activities. His grandfather, Sayyid Hadi, who migrated from Herat, was a prolific author and held in high esteem in the Mughal Court. He was awarded the title of 'Jawad Ali Khan' by Emperor Alamgir II. His father, Mir Muhammad Muttaqi, who was close to Akbar Shah II, was a scholar of Sufism. He was a follower of the famous mystic, Delhi Shah Ghulam Ali, a disciple of Ahmad Sirhindi (1838)⁸. Syed Ahmad Khan's mother, Aziz un-Nisa, who played an influential role in his life, was a pious and well-educated woman. Her father was appointed by Akbar II in 1803 as a political officer at the court of Ava (Burma) and in 1815 was appointed by the

amassed its own army with its main garrisons at Madras, Bombay and Bengal. From 1820s onwards till the Mutiny, a period that coincided with the first half of Syed Ahmad Khan's life, the Company assumed a governing role in the acquired territories.

⁷ For a fairly objective account and sympathetic portrayal of the life and rule of Bahadur Shah II as the last Mughal Emperor and his fateful feud with the British East India Company culminating with the 1857 Indian Mutiny, perhaps the most sympathetic so far, see William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006). For a critical review of the book soon after its publication, see Geoffrey Moorhouse, "Zafar the Ditherer," *The Guardian*, 11 November 2006.

⁸ Altaf Hossain Hali, *Hayat-e-Javid*, 32-33.

same Emperor as the Prime Minister with the title 'Nawab Dabir ud-Dowla.'⁹ The rest of the family were equally gifted in law and natural and social sciences.

For his early education, as was normally the case with boys from aristocratic families within the Mughal elites, he received instructions in the traditional religious sciences. Additionally, he received lessons in the rational sciences, particularly arithmetic and astronomy. The religious knowledge that he learned pertained mainly to the study of the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence. He first learned the Quran from his own mother. But his parents provided him with the best education by providing him with a personal tutor, Maulvi Hamiduddin to teach him at home the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. According to Hali, Syed Ahmad Khan developed his mental capabilities only through continuous exercise in hard intellectual work.¹⁰ Syed Ahmad Khan's informal education was what shaped his thinking to be unconventional, as he went against the grain of his peers in terms of his thinking, and it can be argued that this was what gave him the courage to unhesitatingly undertake the magnificent work of national reform¹¹.

It was significant that Syed Ahmad Khan chose to start his career at the East India Company. May be, he already realized then that Muslim rulers had lost the ability to lead the country¹² and therefore, arguably, he had no qualms working for the company. Due to his excellent service, in 1839 he was promoted as 'Naib-e-Munshi', transferred to Agra, and in 1841, was promoted as 'Munsif' (sub-judge). Due to his growing reputation, the Emperor gave him the title 'Jawad al-Dawlah, Arif Jang' upon his promotion to the post of 'Sadr al-Ameen.'¹³ In 1845, he moved back to Delhi to take care of his mother after the death of his brother. His return to Delhi proved to be a major turning point of his career thanks to the intellectual atmosphere and rich cultural heritage of the place. He

⁹ A. H. Hali, 34-35.

¹⁰ A. H. Hali, 55-56.

¹¹ A. H. Hali, part one, 289-290.

¹² H. Zubairi Riazuddin, *The Educational and Social Ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 1971, 94-95.

¹³ Malik Hafiz, *Political Profile of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*. (Islamabad: Institute of Islamic History, Culture and Civilization, Islamic University, 1982), 200.

took this opportunity to acquire deeper knowledge on various subjects such as *al-Fiqh*, *Usul al-Fiqh*, Arabic Literature, *al-Hadith*, *al-Qur'an* from well-known Islamic scholars and participated in the literary and poetic meetings in Delhi.

His career as an author started in 1842 when he published a number of treatises in Urdu on history and religious subjects. Among his earliest works were *Jila al-Qulub bi Zikr al-Mahbub: A Biography of Our Prophet* (1842), *Tuhfa-i-Hasan* (Urdu translation of *Tuhfa Ithna 'Ashariyya* of Shah al-Aziz al-Dihlawi (1844), and *Tashil fi Jarr-i-Saqil* (1844). In 1847, he published a book titled *Athar al-Sanadid* ("The Heritage of Ancient Heroes") on Delhi and its ruins¹⁴. In 1852, he wrote two more works, namely *Namiqa dar Bayan Masala Tasawwur-i-Shaikh* and *Silsilat ul-Mulk*. A few years later, in 1870, he established a monthly journal, *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*. In the first issue, he discussed Tunisian-Arab nationalism, which was influenced by western thought. The motto of his journal was borrowed from the Tunisian journal *al-Ra'id al-Tunisi*, which states: "Love of the nation is an integral part of faith. Whosoever strives for the progress of his country, really endeavors to raise the honor of his religion."¹⁵ The main purpose of this journal was to awaken the Muslims from their slumber and to bring about a rapprochement between the Muslims, Hindus and the Christians.¹⁶ He blamed the East India Company for its aggressive expansion and ignorance of the Indian culture that contributed to the eruption of the Rebellion. He propagated support of the Indians, Muslims and Hindus who unitedly struggled to free India from the foreign power. He sought for Muslims and Hindus to live together, suffer together and to die

¹⁴ The book deals with the historical monuments of Old Delhi, its buildings, and biographies of 120 scholars, saints, physicians, calligraphists, musicians and artists of the city. It was well received by his learned contemporaries. A second book with the same title was published in 1854. Both books have been translated into English. See Syed Ahmad Khan, *Asar-us-Sanadid*, translated and edited by Rana Safvi (Tulika Books, 2018). For a discussion on the two books and their differences, see C. M. Naim, "Syed Ahmad and his two books called Asar-al-sanadid," *Modern Asian Studies*, volume 45, Issue 3, 669 – 708.

¹⁵ Sayyid Ahmad, *Maqalat-i-Sir Sayyid: Mazamin Mua'alliqah Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* (Lahore: Majlis-i-Taraqqi-i-Adab, 1962), 52-59.

¹⁶ A. H. Hali, no. 55, 269, 282.

together and to behave as charitable neighbours.¹⁷

After the Rebellion, he devoted his life to religious, educational and social reforms and development in three main areas.¹⁸ His visit to England in 1869 brought him closer to the British Raj and influenced him to establish educational and cultural institutions in India because of the advancement of Western education, civilization and culture. He was so impressed by English education and character of the people such as politeness, good faith, cleanliness, skilled workmanship, and accomplishment. He was also fascinated by their architecture, especially when he visited spacious mansions, museums, engineering workshops, gunfoundries, telegraph companies and libraries.¹⁹ It can be argued that he was inspired by the progress he saw there and wanted to establish the same principles of progress in India.

Hindu-Muslim Relations in Nineteenth-Century India

From the historical perspective, in regards to the ethnic and religious pluralism characteristic of modern India, Hindu-Muslim relations have developed over the decades since the powerful Mughal Empire. Tolerance between the two rival groups was the means to stabilize the situations in the country. In this section, some salient features of Hindu-Muslim relations during the time of Syed Ahmad Khan will be discussed. By 1820, the British firmly established its supremacy in modern India. British imperialism had colossal impact upon the Indian society. Growing frustration and discontent particularly amongst Indian Muslims expressed itself in religious decrees, fatwa, and comments by the ulama against the British. The fatwas were: (1) declaring India as *dar al-harb*, (2) Jihad is an obligatory duty for

¹⁷ Abdul Hamid, "The Aligarh Movement" in Mahmud Hossain, ed., *A History of the Freedom Movement* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1961), vol. II, part. II, 517.

¹⁸ The three areas are: (1) to create understanding between Muslims and Christians and to show that there is no conflict between Islam and Christianity because of their common moral messages and commonality as Abrahamic faiths; (2) to establish Aligarh Scientific Society for all Indians in order to develop science education; and (3) to come up with real explanations of the root causes of the Mutiny and to find solutions to the underlying problems for the betterment of the Indian community.

¹⁹ A. H. Hali, 55 & 104.

Muslims, and (3) Jihad is permitted, if Muslims are obstructed by the enemy to observe religious beliefs and duties, and are oppressed and occupied by the enemy in their motherland.²⁰ In 1803, Shah Abdul Aziz issued a fatwa that “India is *dar al-harb* (the abode of war).”²¹ But some ulama disagreed. There was a counter fatwa by the ulama of North India as decided by the Mohammadan Literary Society of Calcutta.²² However, situations worsened and Muslims expressed their adversity and dissatisfaction against the British. Religious leaders who went against the British were Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi (1831) who led the *Tariqa-i-Mohammadi*, Shah Abdul Hai (1878), supported by the families of Shah Waliullah and Shah Ismail.²³ Another revivalist was Haji Shariatullah (1840) from Bengal, who founded the *Faraidi Movement* in 1806.²⁴ The uprising of 1857 was the last attempt of the Indian Muslims to restore their power in India. But it failed due to the lack of organization, a reality accepted by the Muslims. This historical event deeply influenced the subsequent development of Syed Ahmad Khan’s thought.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Muslims felt the necessity of a new dynamic and balanced leadership. They were searching for a leader who could deal with the British rulers and their resurgent Hindu compatriots. In the aftermath of the Rebellion, there was no house in Delhi that was not plundered and ransacked by the British. Even the family of a loyalist like Syed Ahmad Khan could not escape harassment. Even though in the revolt, both Hindus and Muslims stood together shoulder to shoulder to overthrow British rule in order to regain their independence, the British felt that the

²⁰ Zia ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deobond School and the Demand for Pakistan* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 16-20. These fatwas were given by *Tariqa-i-Muhammadi*, who played a certain role against the British. See Ahmad Khan Bahadur, *Review on Dr Hunter’s Indian Musalmans: Are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?* (Banaras: Medical Hall Press, 1872), 51.

²¹ Shah Abdul Aziz, *Fatawa-i-Azizi* (Deoband: no date), vol. 2, 30-31. See also M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967), 390-391.

²² P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 108-115.

²³ M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, 390-391.

²⁴ Istiyaq Hussain Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of Indo-Pak Subcontinent, 610-1947: A Brief Historical Analysis* (New York: Publications in Near and Middle East Studies Columbia Studies, 1962), 209-220.

Mutiny was engineered primarily by Muslims. Consequently, British policy became rigid, retaliatory, and distrustful towards the Muslims. The revolt against the British could be considered as a turning point particularly for the Muslims. The new rulers substituted Persian with English and western education, closed the doors of civil and military services for Muslims, and employed the strategy of divide and rule. In contrast, the Hindus were able to accommodate the colonialists by adopting western education and ways of life. Consequently, Muslims became the enemy of the rulers, while Hindus became supporters in the eyes of the British.

In 1885, the All India National Congress was founded to bridge the gap between the British government and the people of India. It aimed to promote political and economic interests of the Hindus in the name of Indian nationalism. At the end of the nineteenth century, Muslim India produced some extraordinarily talented leaders such as Syed Ahmad Khan himself, followed by Abul Kalam Azad and Jinnah. All of them were vital in overcoming chaotic political and economic situations in modern India. However, the manipulative policy of the British succeeded in inciting mutual enmity between Hindus and Muslims and between high and low caste Hindus. With respect to the Muslims, the All India Muslim League was founded in 1906 with the aim of promoting the welfare of the Muslim community and creating their political awareness. They adopted *Sawraj* (native country) as their political goal with the view of improving Hindu-Muslim relations with the common objective of independence. The nation's founding father and other community leaders were aware of the cultural and religious diversity in India, and realized that this could either be a source of strength or a source of disaster to its well-being. In this spirit of comprehension, one popular slogan, 'Hind-Muslim bhai-bhai' was adopted to win the hearts and minds of the general people to establish national unity and freedom in India. Therefore, it can be concluded that the early leaders of modern India were sincere, committed and well-intentioned in achieving their goals. They were deeply concerned with issues of inter-ethnic and interreligious peace and harmony.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Syed Ahmad Khan was an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity. At that time, Hindus and

Muslims were inclined to the idea of a united modern India, because they were used to living together in peace and harmony for centuries under Mughal rule. Maintaining peaceful Hindu-Muslim relations was essential, because they had common interests in many aspects. This consciousness caused Hindus and Muslims to unite against the British for the freedom of their nation. Relations between Hindus and Muslims are like the Ganges and Jumna, Syed Ahmad Khan once said, and this inseparable relationship has been reflected frequently in their political, social and religious relationships.²⁵ In pursuit of their unity, Syed Ahmad Khan took several measures. First, defending Hindu-Muslim interests when he was in the Legislative Council in the British government. Second, in 1888, establishing the Association of Indian Patriots to object to the Indian Congress Party. Third, the creation of the Hindu-Islamic Education Association, which undertook translations of English advanced scientific achievements into Hindi and Urdu for the benefit of Hindus and Muslims. Fourth, in 1859, founding the Moradabad University in which he introduced modern history curriculum and admitted students from both communities. Fifth, promoting the usage of Hindi and Urdu as national languages.²⁶ Sixth, opening the Muslim Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College to all (in the beginning).

Syed Ahmad Khan's Approach: The Establishment of Hindu-Muslim Relations

There are many evidences of Syed Ahmad Khan's concern with the promotion of peaceful Hindu-Muslim relations in modern India. He was not only attentive in building the Muslim identity but also keen to strengthen a holistic national identity for all Indians. He believed that religion is not an obstacle to national unity, but instead it is a source of the common humanity of human beings. Throughout his life, he strove for the establishment of Indian nationalism, humanism, cultural nationalism and Muslim nationalism or Islamic nationalism in India by bringing together Hindus and Muslims to live peacefully

²⁵ Tara Chand, *History of the Indian Freedom Movement* (Jaipur: RBSA Publication, 1988), 357-358.

²⁶ Jiang Lan, "The Evolution of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Political Identity," *CSCanada Cross-Cultural Communication*, vol.12, no. 7 (2016), 5-9.

side by side as one united nation.

In post-Mutiny India, the attitudes of Syed Ahmad Khan towards the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations may be examined under two phases, namely from 1857 – 1884 and from 1885 – 1898. In the first phase, he spoke of national unity under the concept of *qawm*, which means ‘the citizen of a country’ or common citizenship. This concept embraces all “Hindus, Muslims, the Christians and those who reside in India.”²⁷ In the second phase, upon his return from England, without ignoring the interest of the Hindu community, he concentrated on reforms of the Muslim community through the concept of *tahdhib al-akhlaq* (lit: moral refinement) and combating anti-Muslim prejudices. In his view, what mainly prevented Muslims from joining government institutions were their backwardness in education and the British “divide and rule” policy in dealing with the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, it was evident that throughout his life, he fought for the common good of all Indians, even though he was criticized for promoting Islamic nationalism.²⁸

Al-Qawm and Indian Nationalism

In *Maqalat-e-Sir Sayyid*, Syed Ahmad Khan explains that the word *qawm* conveys the wide meaning of caste, class, and social group. He provides the examples of Nawabs, Sayyids, Muftis, Quadis, Gypsies, and Tanners as synonyms for ‘a specific *qawm*.’²⁹ The word *qawm* also denotes people, race, and nation such as when referring to the French, Greeks, Germans, Turks, Persians and Arabs, each of whom is a nation. Likewise, Hindus, Muslims, Bengalis, Christians and Persians and others, who reside in India constitute one *qawm*.³⁰ He believed that a nation can exist with a diversity of cultures, religions, castes, tribes and communities such as found in modern India, where various ethnic groups have lived cooperatively for thousands of

²⁷ Sayyid Ahmad, *Maqalat-i-Sir Sayyid: Ta`limi Maqalat* (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i-Adab, 1963), 160.

²⁸ Shan Muhammad, compiled and edited, *Writings and Speeches of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Bombay, 1972), 1-12.

²⁹ Mohammad Ismail Panipati, *Maqalat-e-Sir Sayed*, vol. 16, 36, 88-89, and 95.

³⁰ Safia Amir, *Muslim Nationhood in India: Perceptions of Seven Eminent Thinkers* (New Delhi: Kanishka publications, 2000), 1.

years. Therefore, he considered them all as the ‘Indian nation.’³¹ In explaining the meaning of *qawm* as ‘the citizens of a country’ he also referred to the Afghans, Iranians and Europeans, who although comprising different religious beliefs and cultures are living in their respective countries as a single nation.³² In the Arab countries for instance, various tribes and races lived in them, but they were all considered as *qawm* or “inhabitants of a country.”³³ For him, the words ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ are merely religious terms, but citizenship-wise, people should not differentiate between the two. His conviction was that those who live in India with different beliefs, are one *qawm*. Hindus and Muslims belong to one *qawm*, because they live on the same soil, equally share the hardships of famines, are governed by the same ruler, and have the same source of benefits. These are the various reasons why he designated the term *qawm* to both nationalities that inhabit India.³⁴

On 27th January 1884, in his speech at Gurdaspur, he further elucidated the concept of one nation (*qawm*):

O Hindu and Muslim brothers! Do you inhabit any country other than India? Do you not inhabit the same land? Are you not burned and buried on the same soil? Do you not treat the same ground and fire upon the same soil? The words ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ are used for religious distinction. By understanding those questions, all of them must be amalgamated for the prosperity and productivity of India.³⁵

The relationship between Hindus and Muslims, he described, is like rice and pulse, which live in cooperation. Therefore, they must live together by the will of God as friends and more practically as brothers. Through them, God has blessed the beautiful face of India with two eyes; if they build their buildings by using two bricks

³¹ Safia Amir, 1.

³² Sayyid Iqbal Ali, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan Ka Safar Namah-i-Punjab* (Aligarh: Institute Gazette Press, 1884), 160-161.

³³ Shan Muhammad, 256-266.

³⁴ Syed Iqbal Ali, *Syed Ahmad Ka Safar Nam-e-Punjab* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1979), 140.

³⁵ Shan Muhammad, 266.

unitedly, they will accomplish their aims.³⁶ He further said:

By the grace of God, two nations are living in India at the moment, and they are so placed that the house of the one attaches to that of the other. They share the same climate, take water from the same river or well. In death and life, joys and griefs of others, everyone is a participant. One cannot live without the cooperation of the other. If they are united, we can sustain each other. If we are divided, it would lead to the destruction and downfall of both; you might have seen and heard in the old history books, and we see it today also that the word 'nation' applies to the people who live in the same country.³⁷

In a reply to a question raised by Anjuman-e-Lahore about *qawm* in Punjab on 20th December 1883, he responded:

I have used the word nation several times in this Anjuman. By this, I do not mean only Muslim; I do not like to identify *qawm* with the words religion, community or group...I wish that all men irrespective of their religion and community may unite together for the common goal. Our religions are undoubtedly different, but there is no reason for enmity among us on this account.³⁸

Tara Chand in his book mentioned that he perceived Hindu-Muslim cooperation or unity [a]s essential; though they are two separate nations, they are one *qawm*. In this regard, Shan Muhammad quoted, "I have often used the word nation several times...my opinion that all men are one and I do not like religion, community, or group to be identified with a nation...I wish, all men irrespective of their religion

³⁶ Syed Ahmad Khan's speech on February 1, 1884 at Jullundar. See Shan Muhammad, 266.

³⁷ Munshi Sirajuddin Ahmad, ed., *Majmua Lecture Ha-e-Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan* (Sadhora: Bilali Press, 1890), 212 (speech nn 27 January, 1884).

³⁸ Shan Muhammad, 267.

and community may unite together for common wellbeing.”³⁹ For him, religion was not an obstruction to unity and nothing to be objected on the ground of conscience.⁴⁰

In his January 27, 1883 speech, Syed Ahmad Khan said:

Just as many reputed people professing the Hindu faith came to this country, so we also came here. The Hindus forgot the country from which they had come; they could not remember their migration from one land to another and came to consider India their home land, believing that their country lies between the Himalayas and Vindhya-chal. Hundreds of years have passed since we, in our turn, left the lands of our origin. We remember neither the climate nor the natural beauty of those lands, neither the freshness of the harvests nor the deliciousness of the fruits nor even do we remember the blessings of the holy deserts. We also came to consider India as our homeland and we settled down here like the earlier immigrants. Thus, India is the home of both of us. We both breathe the air of India and take the water of the holy Ganges and the Jamuna. We both consume the product of the Indian soil. We are living and dying together.⁴¹

In his patriotic lecture, in 1872, when he was invited by Nawab Muhammad Abdul Latif (1828-1893) – who was the founder of the *Muslim Literary society* – to deliver a lecture in Calcutta on patriotism, Syed Ahmad stated: “Love of the nation is part of faith. Whosoever strives for the progress of his country, really endeavors to raise the honor of his religion.” This, as mentioned earlier, became the motto of his journal. On this, he commented that love of nation and love of land are not synonymous and the motto was suitable for Tunisia. For the context of India, however, he adopted the motto with

³⁹ Shan Muhammad, xxii.

⁴⁰ Chand Tara, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 358-359.

⁴¹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 12 June 1897 reprinted by M.S. Jain in his work, *The Aligarh Movement: Its Origin and Development, 1858-1906*, 138, 178.

modification. Interestingly, he said that the love of the Muslim nation had motivated him to undertake an inclusive program of educational, cultural and political reform among the Muslims.⁴² In the context of India, Islam is a culture and nation building force, which instituted the foundation of the concept of nationalism, because its derivation was the historical cultural heritages and common values that developed Hindu-Muslim relations. He stated:

“By living so long in India the blood of both has changed. The color of both has become similar. The Muslims have acquired hundreds of customs from the Hindus and the Hindus have also learned hundreds of things from the Muslims. We mixed with each other so much that we produced a new language – Urdu – which was neither our language nor their language. Thus, if we ignore that aspect of ours which we owe to God, both of us on the basis of being common inhabitants of India, constitute one nation. The progress of our country is possible through mutual cooperation, sympathy and love.⁴³

Syed Ahmad Khan did raise one important question: Instead of being united, why are Indians divided? If Hindus and Muslims clash against each other, and blame each other, this beautiful relation will be ugly. He, therefore, advised them to understand the situation and stop the culture of blaming one another. He wrote:

We shall destroy ourselves by mutual disunity and animosity and ill-will to each other. It is pitiable to see those who do not understand this point and create feelings of disunity among these two nations and fail to see that they will be the victims of such a situation and inflict injury to themselves.... India is like a bride blessed by two beautiful and lustrous eyes – Hindus and Muslims. If they quarrel against each other, the bride will become ugly; if one destroys the other, it will lose

⁴² Sayyid Ahmad, *Maqalat-i-Sir Sayyid, Mazamin Mutaa`lliqah Tahdhib Akhlaq*, (Lahore: Majlis-i-Taraqqi-i-Adab), 1962, 52-59.

⁴³ M.S. Jain, “The Aligarh Movement,” 138, 178.

one eye. Therefore, people of India, do you wish to make this bride, either squint eyed or one-eyed or reserve both eyes?⁴⁴

His priority was the well-being of the Indian nation. For instance, for the development of the North-West Provinces, he wrote a letter to R. Simon, secretary to the government of the North-West Provinces to explain to him that the people of these provinces were really backward and lagged behind compared to the people of the other areas of India. The government took his suggestions seriously in order to lay the foundation of the building of Indian society, and made concerted efforts to develop the social and economic conditions of the people of North-West India.⁴⁵ For the establishment of Hindu-Muslim relations, in 1897, a year before he died, Syed Ahmad Khan wrote a lengthy article in which he stressed that diversity of religions is not an obstacle but mutual intercourse, and that sympathy to each other can mend unity. Likewise, political differences should not be an obstacle to maintaining close relations between Hindus and Muslims.

In the same article, he opined that be it Muslims, Hindus or Christians, all who live in India should be closer to each other and develop mutual understanding, brotherly feelings and interaction. He felt that a nation can flourish and prosper, if the nation preserves friendship, unity and love among themselves without any religious distinction. A nation sustains with mutual co-operation, love, sympathy and brotherhood without minding political differences.⁴⁶ In *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, he defended the Hindu community against the Christian missionaries, who had been preaching against Hindu religious beliefs. He disapproved the missionaries, and criticized them for their insensitivities to the dietary practices of different Hindu castes.⁴⁷

In another article, *Tarikh-i-Sharkashi-i-Zila Bijnour* published

⁴⁴ Shan Muhammad, ed. 159-160.

⁴⁵ Altaf Hossain Hali, *Hayat-e-Javed*, no. 55, 254-256; see also Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tahdhib-e-Akhlaq*, ed., Munsi Faluddin (Lahore, 1894), 246, 354.

⁴⁶ M.S. Jain, "The Aligarh Movement," 138, 178.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi, *The Genesis of Muslim Fundamentalism in British India* (New Delhi: Eastern Book Corporation, 1987), 67.

in 1858, he stressed that generally the relationship between Hindus and Muslims was amicable and harmonious, but the conflict between them arose from the revolt of 1857 in Bijnor.⁴⁸ It was true that he spoke for the interest of Muslims, but he never unheeded issues of the other communities, contrary to accusations by various parties that he sacrificed only for the development of Muslims. As a good example, in the Scientific Society that he founded in 1864, its 109 members comprised both Muslims and Hindus. Raja Kishan Das, a Hindu, was his righthand man, who was active in the society.⁴⁹ Likewise, when he organized a meeting on August 1, 1882 to prepare a proposal for Muslim education reforms before submitting it to the Educational Committee, nine of its members were Hindus. His struggle against illiteracy and educational reformation was for all Indians.⁵⁰ Among the twenty-two members of the Managing Committee of the MAO College, six were Hindus.⁵¹ It is important to remark, however, that those who have attributed the 'two nation theory' to Syed Ahmad Khan have misunderstood his conception of *qawm*. He was, in fact, advancing the concept of a 'pluralistic society' ahead of his time.

Concluding Remarks

It is true that as a religious reformist, as Abbasi commented, Syed Ahmad Khan sacrificed his life to defend and promote the Muslims' welfare, but he never disregarded the interests of the Hindus.⁵² He made constant appeals to both communities to live together like brothers and sisters and work collaboratively for the common good as one people. His dream was to integrate the two cultures into one national entity. Due to his sincere struggle in uniting the two communities, he has been hailed as a champion of Hindu-Muslim

⁴⁸ Malik Hafiz, *Political Profile of Sir Sayyad Ahmad Khan*, 50-58.

⁴⁹ Iftikhar Alam Khan, *Sir Syed and Scientific Society* (New Delhi: Makaba Jamia United, Jamia Nagar, 2000), 17-18, 144-148.

⁵⁰ Shan Muhammad, *The Aligarh Movement: A Concise Study* (Aligarh: Book House, 1999), 107-109.

⁵¹ They were Thakur Gir Prasad Singh of Banaras, Raja Jai Kishan Das, Pandit Radha Kishan, Babu Jogendra Nath, Lala Lokman Das, and Babu Tota Ram.

⁵² Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi, *The Genesis of Muslim Fundamentalism in British India*, 67.

unity. His main aim as a religious scholar was to explore religious truth in the contemporary context using his synthesizing power, and to stimulate the Muslims to be self-dependent politically and culturally. Through his concept of *qawm* he conceived of all Indians as one nation and energetically advocated peaceful Hindu-Muslim relations. During his travel to various parts of India, he delivered speeches stressing the concept and importance of Hindu-Muslim unity. As a nationalist in the early part of his early life, he struggled to establish national unity, integrity, communal harmony and probity in education, public administration, and the economic sector for all Indians.

He realized that maintaining good Hindu-Muslim relations was essential for the prosperity of India when it was under the British rule. In this political situation, he considered national unity as a necessary step towards the success of India where the two religious groups could foster communal understanding and broadmindedness. Both would “extend a helping hand to each other, live together, feel pain together and die together in this country.”⁵³ To help bridge the widening gap between the Hindu and Muslim communities in India and establish a harmonious relation between them, Syed Ahmad Khan proposed a thorough reform of the country’s educational system. His idea of an educational reform for a pluralistic India that would in particular help preserve Hindu-Muslim unity would be discussed in a forthcoming article.

⁵³ Dar Farooq Ahmad, “Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Hindu-Muslim question in India,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, vol. 55, Issue. 2, July-December (2018), 12.