

## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

**Farooq Ahmad Dar**

### **Abstract**

Syed Ahmad Khan is considered as a symbol of change. He achieved personal success and had contributed massively towards the development and progress of the Muslims of South Asia. He challenged traditional trends and showed a new path of modernity, through western education, to his community. However, in order to do so, he established friendly relations with the colonial masters, showed them his loyalty and pursued them for support. This paper is an attempt to find out that how much the British patronage helped Syed in achieving his goal and what was the impact of the strategy, he adopted.

**Keywords:** British; Loyalism; Muslims; South Asia; Syed Ahmad Khan

### **Introduction**

Syed Ahmad Khan is considered as one of the most respected personalities amongst the Muslims of South Asia. He was the pioneer of Muslim renaissance and resurgence as a nation in modern India. He was thinking ahead of his time and was not only ready to challenge the traditional mindset but was also in a position to give the Muslims of India an alternative path, which could resolve their social, economic and political problems and lead them to progress and success in the times to come. His contributions towards the promotion of modern education were enormous and second to none amongst his contemporaries. His dedication for education and his practical investment in the field had a great impact on the future development of the Muslim community in the region. He was also the one who introduced rational and logical thinking amongst the Indian Muslims, who otherwise mainly used to depend on emotional decisions. It would not be wrong to state that he was the one who revolutionized the thinking process amongst the Muslims of India and equipped them with tools which could help them to enter the modern era in a comparatively comfortable manner.

In the beginning, there was a lukewarm response from the Muslim community as there was a huge resentment against the process of change that Syed wanted to introduce. However, with the passage of time, he started getting support and eventually, though after his death, it was his methodology which became the mainstream narrative of the Muslims of the region. The graduates of Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College played the most significant role in shaping the political future of Muslim India. It was the close associates of Syed, Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Waqar-ul-Mulk etc., who were behind the formation of All India Muslim League in 1906. It was also the graduates and students of the same institution, who became front line activists

---

\*Author is Associate Professor, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad  
Correspondence: [farooq@qau.edu.pk](mailto:farooq@qau.edu.pk)

## Farooq Ahmad Dar

of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, in his struggle for Pakistan. Even after the creation of Pakistan, Syed is generally considered as one of the founding fathers of the country and his teachings and contributions are not only part of the national curriculum but are also popular amongst the educated class, which dominates the decision making in the country.

In order to achieve all this, Syed, to say the least, heavily depended on the British facilitation. He was motivated by the process of modernization in the West and thus wanted his people to follow the British in order to move forwards. He decided to become a loyal subject of the British Raj, whom he always praised and got inspiration from. To him, allegiance to the Crown was the only source of peace and progress for India. He considered British rule as a ray of hope after a “long period of... mitigated slavery” of common people under the despotic rule of Hindu Rajas and the Muslim Emperors. (Baljon 1964, 4) He considered the British rule in India as the “age of progress” under the “government which was bond by laws”. (Aligarh Institute Gazette, May 5, 1876) He was sure that British would modernize India with industrialization, trade, fast modes of transportation and communication and effective educational system. (Pasha 1998, 268) It is important to understand that his ideas were not implanted on him by the British but were result of his independent opinion, something he expressed repeatedly and throughout his life.

Syed took the responsibility to work for the reconciliation between the annoyed British rulers and aggrieved Muslim subjects. For this he tried to curtail the hatred which the Muslims would possibly hold against the British. He tried to convince the Indian Muslims that loyalty towards British was the only method they needed to adopt, if they really wanted to have peace and religious freedom. He tried to convince them that in order to improve the quality of their life, they should learn, if not adopt, the British language, traditions, sciences, educational methods and their way of living. On the other hand, he tried to remove fears from the British opinion that Muslims were not likely to be faithful to them as their religion would not allow them to adopt any such approach. He asked the Government to understand that in spite of the ostensible Muslim antipathy and aggression, they, from inside, were loyal to the Crown. He urged them to change their policy towards the Muslims by trying to remove the Muslim “fears of official hostility” and create a “climate of confidence” (Khan n.d., 54) as it would be beneficial for both the stability of the British raj as well as the Muslim progress.

To Syed, the British Government was a blessing for the Indians and they should “thank God that owing to the British Government in India there is so much peace and order in the country and so much freedom among its subjects that no parallel to it can be found anywhere in the world”. He asserted that there could “be no better principles of Government than those on which the British Government is based”. He added that the “rights of the subjects, their wealth, and their liberty” were safer under the British Government than anywhere else in the world. (Begum 1985, 164-65) He believed that

## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

British rule in India would be favorable for the educational and cultural uplift of the Indians in particular and Muslims in general, while their withdrawal would be retrogressive and troublesome for the political climate of the country. He rated the British Empire very high and thought that it would be everlasting. He wished that British would rule India for good and would never go back. He went to the extent that he declared that "even if I were appointed the Viceroy of India, I would endeavor just as well to strengthen the rule of Queen-Empress in India". (Malik 1970, 144) He wanted Indian Muslims not to bother about the external policy of the British Indian Government. According to him they should not be concerned about the British attacks on neighboring countries and should not show any sympathy for their co-religionists in Afghanistan. (Pasha 1998, 266) He told the Muslims that Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey was only a king and not the caliph and thus they were not his subjects. He emphasized that in case of any conflict between Britain and Turkey, the sympathies of the Indian Muslims should be with their colonial masters. (Sayeed 1998, 15)

In fact, loyalty to the rulers was in Syed's genetics. His ancestors moved to India during the rule of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, and ever since they remained faithful servants of the Mughal court. Illustrious members of both his paternal and maternal sides of the family held important administrative positions and remained men of mark during the entire period. They significantly contributed in the intellectual, corporate and cultural life of India during a period spread over almost three centuries. Besides their scholarship, efficiency and courteousness, their main strength was their dedicated allegiance to the regime. His paternal grandfather, Syed Hadi, held a mansab during the reign of Alamgir II and was given the command of one thousand foot soldiers and five hundred horsemen. He was also given the title of Jawad Ali Khan or Jawad-ud-Daula by the emperor. (Muhammad 1976, 3) His father, Syed Muttaqi, served as the personal advisor to Emperor Akbar Shah II. While writing about his father, Syed himself claims that he "had an age long relationship with the Mughal Court". He was "very close to Akbar Shah II", since the days when the latter was a "crown prince". Two of them were so close that the king always used to address Syed's father as "Brother Muttaqi". (Sherwani 1994, 306-07)

From amongst the family members, the personality which had the biggest impact on Syed was his maternal grandfather, Khawaja Farid-ud-Din Ahmad. He was the most distinguished member of the family and was one of the influential natives of India during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He remained wazir in the court of the Emperor Akbar Shah II, who also gave him the title of Nawab Dabir-ud-Daula Musleh Jung. However, his uniqueness lies in the fact that besides his closeness with the Mughal court he also had proximity with the British. He was one of the earliest Indians to serve the British government in important positions. In 1797, on the recommendation of the British officials posted at Lucknow, he was appointed as a superintendent at Calcutta. From there he was picked by Governor-General, The Earl of Mornington, Richard Wellesley, who appointed him as his attaché at the Court of the Shah of Iran, Fath Ali Shah Qajar in 1799. (Khan 2009, 25) Later he was also

## Farooq Ahmad Dar

assigned the duty to represent the British Indian Government as Political Officer at the court of the King of Burma at Ava. Khawaja also had personal relations with British high-ups. Major-General David Orterlony, British Resident to the Mughal court, was his personal friend and he used to visit his residence quite often. (Hali 2009, 8)

Since his childhood, Syed was under the influence of Khawaja. He spent his early childhood in a joint family at his maternal grandfather's mansion in Delhi. In that controlled environment, he had a very little chance to interact with common people. British influence on his grandfather had an impact on the environment of the family. Syed used to play sports with his cousins which were not common amongst Indian and were actually imported from Britain. His favorite outdoor sports were cricket and football and amongst the indoor games he liked chess the most. He was also taught archery and swimming, the activities which were customary amongst the privileged class of that era. He also had the opportunity to interact frankly with his grandpa's guests that includes members of the British elite. According to Graham one day when he, as a five years old child, was sitting on the lap of Octerlony, confidently asked the General that "why he wore feathers in hat and so many gold buttons on his coat". (Graham 1974, 3) He also got the opportunity to interact with famous poets and eminent scholars of his time. Even after the death of Khawaja in 1828, when Syed was only eleven years old, he was brought up under the strict and disciplinary guidance of his mother Aziz-un-Nisa Begum. It is needless to say that Aziz-un-Nisa was also a great admirer of her father.

Syed's father's death in 1838, created a financial problem for the family. All the allowances, except for a little stipend, were stopped and properties which were given to Muttaqi for the duration of his life were also taken back. This compelled him to search for a job. He was not an expert of any particular field as he kept switching interest in different subjects during his student life<sup>1</sup>. (Dar 1957, 3) So it became difficult for him to find any good job. However, young Syed made a couple of quick decisions. One, he realized that the future lies with the British and thus made up his mind that he would follow the footsteps of his maternal grandfather and would look for a job with the British government and not with the Mughal court. Two, he was clear that he would work hard and was ever ready to learn anything that would help him grow. He on the recommendation of his uncle, Moulvi Khalilullah Khan, who was at that time Sadar Amin in Delhi, joined the judiciary department as Saristadar (a junior clerk). At that time he knew nothing about the methods employed in the courts and was totally naive about the English law. He requested his uncle to allow him to watch the working of his court as an observer, so that he could understand the system. (Hali 2009, 29).

---

<sup>1</sup> He read Holy Quran from a female teacher at home. Then he was sent to the Maktab of Moulvi Hamidduddin where he was taught Arabic and Persian. For a short period he studied arithmetic and geometry under the guidance of his uncle, Nawab Zainul Abidin Khan. Next he got interested in medicine and under the supervision of Hakeem Ghulam Haider Khan, he read some elementary books on the subject.

## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

Once he entered the service, Syed never looked back. He, due to his loyalty more than his ability and hard work, was always very much in demand. With the exception of one incidence, he never challenged the orders of his colonial masters. The only time when Syed protested against decision of a British officer was when Pollock, the Collector of Agra, recommended a seating plan for the gathering of Lieutenant Governor's durbar, in which superior seats were reserved for the British and inferior for the Indians. However, even on this occasion, he soon realized his mistake and tendered an unconditional apology. (Pasha 1998, 128) His British officers were very much inspired by his approach and he was always in their good books. He managed rapid promotions and in a very short span of time, he first became Naib Munshi and then Munshi. He switched from the clerical carder to a junior judge on the recommendation of Robert Hamilton, the then Commissioner of Agra. (Habib 1983, 22) He could also manage a posting to Delhi in 1846, when his elder brother Syed Mohammad Khan died, only due to his good repute with the British officers.

At the time of the Indian uprising of 1857, Syed was posted as Sadr Amin in district Bijnor. Being a worker of the British East India Company, he showed his loyalty to his employer. He stood firmly with the British administration in countering the mutiny. He did his utmost to protect the lives of the British officers and their families in his city. He worked day and night with Alexander Shakespeare, the Magistrate and Collector of Bijnore, who later on became a very good friend. He was so much involved in the war that he himself started carrying weapon all the time. It is on record that Syed saved the lives of many British officers, their wives and children. His services were lauded by the British high-ups. (Kaye and Malleon 1889, 108-118) John Strachey, Lieutenant Governor of the North West provinces, considered that Syed's courage and loyalty to the British government during the war was unmatched. In the words of C. J. Wilson, Officer on Special Duty and Judge at Muradabad and Bijnore, Syed was a "loyal and faithful subject of the British Government". He added that Syed "held out Bijnore for the British Government even after the departure of the British officers from that situation". (The Aligarh Institute Gazette, May 22, 1875) Some Englishmen confirmed that their opinion of Indians would have remained poor had they not met Syed. (Haq 1961, 462-63)

At the end of the war, due to some personal losses as well as national tragedy, Syed was very much disappointed and he decided to migrate from India and to settle in Egypt for good. However, eventually he realized that it would be "cowardly" and "almost inhuman" on his part "to run away to safety" when his nation "was lying in ruins". (Hali 2009, 56) Immediately after the war, in recognition of his services, he was promoted to the post of Sadr-us-Sudur and was posted to Muradabad In continuation of his policy of loyalty, on July 28, 1859, he organized a meeting to praise the Queen, on behalf of his co-religionists, for promulgating a decree of mercy for her subjects who, in his opinion, faltered during the war. He also thanked God for putting the Indians under the shelter of just rulers. (Abbasi 1988, 69) When drought broke out in the area, Strachey in acknowledgement of his "administrative skills",

## Farooq Ahmad Dar

personally decided to give him the additional charge of Officer on Special Duty to administer the relief work for rehabilitation of the starving people. (Hali 2009, 70) No doubt, Syed worked hard to facilitate his countrymen during those difficult days, yet one can easily claim that his appointment was purely on the basis of his relationship with the Government officials.

Syed used his writing skills to bridge the gulf between the British and Indians in general and Muslims of India in particular. His pamphlet, *Sarkash-i-Zila Bijnor*, published from Agra in 1858, was a criticism on Indians who rebelled against the British. In his opinion the rebellion was mainly due to “the ingratitude of Indians” towards the good governance provided to them by the British. He reminded the Indian people about the operation they faced during the regime of the Indian rulers who were ousted by the British. He believed that it was “the religious duty (iman) of the subjects to support the government”. He added that the Indians “forgot this duty” when they “did the opposite and turned into dust the honour of all our fellow countrymen”. He wrote with sadness that had the Indians performed their duty, “this evil day” of suffering “would not have come”. He suggested the Indians to wipe out their old impression in the eyes of the government by showing their “obedience and loyalty and sincere support of the government” in order to get good results in the future. (Mirza 1964, 314) Syed, in this leaflet acknowledged that Indians in general had risen against the government and were getting due chastisement, from which he and other loyalists like him, were exempted. (Akhtar 2015, 24)

After his booklet on the revolt in Bijnor he wrote another titled *Risala Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind*, in which he dealt with causes of the Indian Revolt in general. In this pamphlet, he blamed British for their ignorance of the Indian mind and for keeping lack of contact between them and their subjects. He criticized them for not seeking amity and affection for its citizens which caused sense of humiliation among the natives. He also disapproved the British strategy of giving swear punishments to the soldiers who refused to use greased cartridges at Meerut. The first impression of the British Government about this tract was negative and Cecil Beadon, the then Home and Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, declared it as “an extremely seditious pamphlet” and wanted proper inquiry. He suggested that the author “should be harshly dealt with” if he fails to give “satisfactory explanation”. (Hali 2009, 63) However, soon they realized that Syed wrote it with good intentions and as a friend of British as though it was written in Urdu and was published Agra, yet the author made it a point that it should not reach the Indian market and should only be available for the British readers. Furthermore, a good read of the pamphlet proves that Syed considered the War of 1857 as a “mutiny” and not a “war of independence”.

When the British introduced Indian Councils Act of 1861, Syed was dissatisfied with the inclusion of Rajas and Nawabs in the council as the nominee of the Government. He thought that they did not represent the larger interests of the indigenous population and thus suggested that the council should include apt and competent Indians from the

## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

middle class. He also criticized the Indian members for remaining silent during the proceedings of the council or for making fallacious proposals. (Abbasi 1988, 66) However, a couple of years later, in order to please the British, he completely changed his opinion. In 1864, while addressing a gathering at Ghazipur, he declared that the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council used to give their independent opinion on legislative proposals without any fear. (Akhtar 2015, 25) Speaking to a meeting of Scientific Society at Aligarh on May 10, 1866, he asked the Indians to show more confidence in the British Government as it would strengthen the foundation of the Government and enhance the mutual friendship between the rulers and the locals. To him, it would eventually benefit the Indians. He advised them to be "loyal in your hearts, place every reliance upon your rulers, speak out openly, honestly, and respectfully all your grievances, hope and fears, and you may be quite sure that such a course of conduct will place you in the enjoyment of all your legitimate rights; and that this is compatible, nay, synonymous with true loyalty to the state, will be upheld by all whose opinion is worth having". (Graham 1974, 62)

Syed was concerned about the fact that even the educated class in northern India was jobless and was confronting a crisis of livelihood. He thought it was only because they were not ready to learn English and were reluctant in getting modern education. He suggested that it had become inexorable for Indians and especially the Muslims to get English education; otherwise their national existence was under threat. On the occasion of the sixth meeting of the Mohammanadan Literary Society under the aegis of Nawab Abdul Latif at Calcutta, held on October 6, 1863, Syed delivered a speech on "Patriotism and the Necessity of Promoting Knowledge in India". (Abbasi 1988, 63) In his speech, he questioned the Muslim gentry that if their children could learn Persian and Arabic, why could they not learn English? He emphasized on the fact that since English was the language of British administration, it was mandatory for the Muslims to learn it in order to obtain reconciliation with the new Indian Government. When he started a new school in Ghazipur to educate the Indian kids, he made English a compulsory subject. The British government was so much pleased with this act of Syed, that they decided to give donation to this school. (Akhtar 2015, 25) British officers in India also gave donations for the formation of Syed's Scientific Society. Bramey donated one thousand rupees from his personal account for the society. (Aligarh Institute Gazette, August 4, 1882)

In 1867 he was promoted as a Judge of Small Causes Court, a position which was not easy for an Indian to achieve in those days. Two years later, Government of India introduced a scholarship for the local students to get higher education in England. Syed's son, Syed Mahmud, became the first student from North Western Province to win funding for studies at Cambridge. Syed was encouraged by some of his English friends including George Farquhar Irving Graham to accompany his son so that he could live up his desire to study the British education system in person. In those days, only Mahrajans and Nawabs could afford to visit England and it was very difficult for a Government servant to even think about undertake such a journey. Furthermore, he

## **Farooq Ahmad Dar**

was fifty two year old and at that time it was considered as an old age for an Indian to embark on such a long sea voyage. Syed defied all the odds, sold his bookshop, mortgaged his house, took leave from his job and was brave enough to assume this challenge. Though he was granted leave without pay, but when he was in London, he requested the Duke of Argyll, Secretary of State for India that it was becoming difficult for him to meet his expenses, and the latter ordered to give him full pay during his leave as a special case. (Kareem 2003, 165) His English friends and admirers like Lord Lawrance also facilitated him, both financially and logistically, during his stay in England. (Haq 1961, 461)

Syed along with his two sons, Syed Hamid and Mahmud, his friend and literary secretary, Mirza Khudadad Baig and his trusted servant Chajju, boarded a steamship, Baroda, on April 10, 1869. Before leaving for London, he specially went to Allahabad to say good bye to William Muir, the then Lieutenant Governor of his province. He also changed his attire and started wearing western suits. On his way, his ship stopped at Paris, a city which in Syed's words was "the Paradise of this world". (Graham 1974, 122) When he reached Britain, first he decided to explore the country. During summer, Syed travelled around different cities of England, Wales and Scotland. He met factory workers, miners, farmers etc. and tried to observe the impact of Industrial Revolution as well as science and technology on the ordinary people. He watched with keenness the working of private sector in an environment of free market economy. He was very much impressed by the system of hospitals which were run by philanthropists or by Christian Missionaries. However, his main area of interest was educational institutions. He visited Eton, Harrow, Oxford, etc. before spending a lot of time at Cambridge. He was very much inspired by their education system, especially co-curricular and extra-curricular activities of the students. He was also fascinated by the libraries that he visited in London and in other cities. (Pasha 1998, 176-78) He realized that Indians needed education system based on the style practiced in Britain.

His visit completely changed Syed's world view and his ideas underwent a radical change. He was so much inspired by the British that, he in their comparison declared Indians "no better than animals and brutes". (Aziz 1976, 20) He had attained the reality that the future of the world belongs to science. He made it clear in his mind that, if Indians need to grow they had no other option but to get modern education and that too in English. He decided to build a university in India on the pattern of Oxford and Cambridge and to start a magazine on the model of Spectator. He was quite clear that if the Indians wanted to revolutionize their social live, they were to discard their old prejudices and had to adopt the modern ways of living as adopted by the British. He came to the conclusion that "better future for India and the Indians" lies in the establishment of "good working relationship between the Indians and the English". In pursuit of this aim, he advised Indians to visit England so that "they could see and assess for themselves, the prosperity of the towns and countries of the Western world, their architecture, their institutions, methods of government trade and education, scientific advances, ship building and other industries". He added that one could also



## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

learn from “the life-style of ordinary men and women, their religion, their hygiene and cleanliness, their sense of freedom, liberty coupled with duty and responsibility” in the western world. (Scientific Society Gazette, February 15, 1869)

After staying in Britain for fifteen months in which he relished the impact of Western civilization at its highpoint, Syed landed back in India on 2 October 1870. On his return, he worked to remove the Muslim prejudices of opposing the idea of English education. He formed A Committee for the better diffusion and advancement of learning amongst the Mohammedans of India with the aim to find out the causes which prevented Muslims from getting modern education. He criticized Muslims for sending their kids to Madrasas as to him the education there was useless for the contemporary times. He started Tahzib ul Akhlaq, a magazine, with the aim to put Muslims back on the tract to progress, mainly by convincing them to get education. While addressing a meeting of Anjuman-i-Islami at Lahore in 1873 he narrated the story of a relative of his friend who in spite of graduating from Deoband had no chance of getting a job. (Akhtar 2015, 26) Now he had only one point agenda, i.e. to start a college on lines of Cambridge and Oxford. He moved around India for the fund raising campaign. Though in principle, he wanted to retain the institution independent of Government, (Graham 1974, 159) but he was not shy of getting help from the Government and its officials. Both central and provincial governments showed willingness to give funding provided that it would only be used for the secular side of the College's educational activities. 1st Earl of Northbrook, William Muir, Hunter and other British officials gave donations on the same condition. (Hussain 1970, 133) Encouraged by a personal donation by British officials in India Syed wrote letters to his personal friends in England, requesting them to form a sub-committees there in order to collect contributions. (Hussain 1970, 119)

Syed's dream came true and the opening ceremony of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental School at Aligarh took place on May 24, 1875. It is important to note that the date was selected in order to commemorate Queen Victoria's birthday<sup>2</sup>. He appointed, H.G.I. Siddons, an Oxford graduate, as the first headmaster of the school. (Khawaja 1916, 5) Moreover, in order to get further support from the Government, he always remained interested in inviting British high-ups to different functions of the school. William Muir, who by then had become Member of Viceroy's Council, visited the School on November 12, 1875 and in his speech, on behalf of the British Government, fully approved the “wide and liberal basis” on which the college was established. He appreciated the idea of teaching history, science and literature in a secular way. (Hussain 1970, 120-21) Muir again visited Aligarh in October 1876. Syed and his colleagues presented him with “a beautifully engrossed address in a sandal-wood box mounted in chased silver”. It was also announced that fund was raised to establish a

---

<sup>2</sup> The preparations for the functioning of the school were not complete by the time of its inauguration ceremony and the school actually started working from June 1, but only in order to show his loyalty to the crown, Syed decided to fix the function on Queen's date of birth.

## Farooq Ahmad Dar

scholarship after the name of William Muir so that the future generations of the Muslims could remember his contributions for the Indian Muslims. In his address Muir acknowledged that the Muslims living in “Upper India” were “faithful to the Queen; and amongst their superior ranks, very many who have been forward to support the British Government in its great work of promoting the prosperity and elevating the social and moral conditions of the people”. (Graham 1974, 170)

When Syed got retirement from his job after serving the British Government in India for thirty seven years, English quarters appreciated him for his contributions as a government employ. Some went to the extent of declaring his role as “exemplary”. Newspapers both in India and England wrote articles and even editorials in which they praised Syed for his loyalty and commitment to the British government throughout his service. John Starchey, the Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Province, praised Syed for his “enlightened and disinterested labours which he had undertaken for the benefit of his countrymen”. (Aligarh Institute Gazette, August 4, 1876) Retirement helped him to focus full time on his Aligarh project. Since the school was initially started in an old building on rent, the first task before Syed was to construct a proper campus before upgrading it into a college. Henry Lawrence, the collector of Aligarh, granted him a seventy four acre of land, which was previously used as a parade ground in the cantonment area of Aligarh, for this purpose. However, when Lawrence was replaced by Montague, the latter opposed this scheme. Syed, used his contacts with Muir, who eventually got the land approved from Starchey. Starchey put two conditions before Syed; i) Construction plan should be approved by the Surveyor General of the Government of India and ii) If the college would go bankrupt, the land as well as construction will be taken back by the Government; which Syed readily accepted. (Pasha 1998, 215)

Northbrook agreed to lay the foundation stone of the college, but his tenure as Viceroy finished before the event took place. His replacement, Robert Bulwer-Lytton, followed his policy and decided to visit Aligarh in person to lay-down the foundation stone of the new campus. On his arrival in the city, he along with his wife and other members of his contingent first visited Syed’s house, where they had their breakfast. The actual ceremony was performed completely in the Western style and in order to please the Viceroy, verses from the Quran were not recited. Following the laying down of the foundation stone, there was a banquet at which toasts were to the Queen, Viceroy and other dignitaries. (Pasha 1998, 216) The viceroy announced an annual donation of Rs. 4200/- for the college, which was later increased to Rs. 12000/- by Lieutenant Governor Alfred Lyall. When the construction was completed, the main library of the college was named after the name of Lytton, the main hall after the name of John Starchey and the park in the campus after the name of William Muir. Scholarship was offered to the students after the name of Northbrook. (Ahmed 2002, 64-65) Theodore Beck was appointed as the first Principal of the college. It in fact became an unwritten tradition that all the important positions in the college were

## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

assigned to British, especially to the graduates from the ivory tower of England, Oxford and Cambridge.

Syed also had very good relations with 1st Marquess of Ripon, who succeeded Lytton. Ripon during his visit to Aligarh on November 18, 1884 had a luncheon at his house. Ripon also had an inspection of all the blocks of the college and was greatly impressed with the standard of education and administration. In the welcome speech, Ripon was assured that the graduates of the institution would be "full of loyalty to the rule of the Queen-Empress, aspire to finding distinction and prominence among various races of the vast empire over which her Majesty holds sway". (Ahmed 2002, 69) In his letter to Northbrook in 1878, Syed confirmed the former Viceroy that the "Indian Muslims being more than a century under the British Government have become so used to a life of peace, liberty and prosperity, that they will never wish to change it for any other Government in the world". (Aligarh Institute Gazette, August 31, 1878) On the other hand he kept pleading before the local Indians that they should always be loyal to their masters. In his address at Town Hall, Amritsar in 1884, he said that at the best Indians could disagree with the British by using apologetic sentences like, "My Lord, I am very sorry I can't agree with your Excellency's proposal". (Akhtar 2015, 25)

For his services, the British Government rewarded Syed with a number of honors and awards. John Lawrence, the Viceroy in 1866 presented him with a gold medal. He also gave him a copy of Thomas Babington Macaulay's collected works on which he penned down the following personal note on the first leaf, "To Moulvi Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadour, in recognition of his conspicuous service in the diffusion of knowledge and general enlightenment among the countrymen". (Aligarh Institute Gazette, May 28, 1889) During his visit to England, he was given the honorary membership of the prestigious Athenaeum Club. On August 6, 1869 he was conferred with the "Star" alongside the "Royal Warrant" bearing the signature of the Queen, who appointed him as a "Companion of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India". He received it from the Duke of Argyll, who also threw a party in Syed's honor, which was attended by the British Parliamentarians and other dignitaries. (Kareem 2003, 61-62) He was specially requested to attend the opening ceremony of Black Friars Bridge and Holborn Viaduct on November 6, 1869, where Queen Victoria was herself the chief guest. He was also called to the Queen's Levee on March 11, 1870 where he got the opportunity to kneel down and kiss the hand of Her Majesty. He was the only civilian invited to participate in the Levee of the Prince of Wales which was reserved for the Army officers alone (Hali 2009, 115) Eventually, Syed was granted the Knighthood in 1888. The Collector of Meerut, Kennedy presented him with the honor on behalf of the Queen on 14 May in a ritual held in the auditorium of the Aligarh College. Addressing the gentry of the city Kennedy admitted that "The people of Europe and India alike have learned from Sayyid sahib's great wisdom and patriotism". He admired Syed by saying that he had "done more than most to create a proper understanding between British and Indian people". (Hali 2009, 217) Syed was

## Farooq Ahmad Dar

also the first Indian to receive honorary degree of L.L.D. by the University of Edinburg in absentia. (Aligarh Institute Gazette, September 30, 1887)

In spite of the fact that he could not speak and even might not completely understand English, yet Syed was designated to many key positions by the British Indian Government. In 1878, Lytton selected him as member of the Imperial Legislative Council<sup>3</sup>, the highest position that an Indian could hold. When his tenure expired after two year, he was retained for another term by Ripon. Later he also served as the member of the North-West Province Legislative Council for two consecutive terms from 1887 to 1891. When British Government in order to appraise the spread of education and to find out methods for extending public instructions, formed an Imperial Commission on Education under William Wilson Hunter, Syed was appointed as one of its members. Later, when Syed could not cope up with the functioning of commission because of his language handicap, he left the commission and on his recommendation, his son Mahmud replaced him. (Aligarh Institute Gazette, June 24, 1882) In October 1886, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava chose him as one of the sixteen member of the Public Service Commission, with the task to come up with a policy to recruit indigenous people in the civil service. (Aligarh Institute Gazette, November 9, 1886) He was also nominated by the British Government as the fellow of both the Calcutta University and the University of Allahbad.

British felt aggrieved, when Syed passed away on March 27, 1898. Most of the leading London based newspapers paid tribute to him either through obituary or editorial. The Pioneer, while publishing the news of his death commented, “With the passing of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a leader of great foresight, who was always a keen champion of the cause of education, an extremely valuable and powerful political force has also been taken from us. In the last quarter of the present century this force stirred the Islamic world to action”. (The Pioneer, March 29, 1898) The Times of London, in an editorial, termed him as an “apostle of education” and praised him for his services “as an interpreter between the Mohammedans of India and their rulers, as well as between them and the British people”. The newspaper credited Syed for being “ever ready to defend his co-religionist from cultural attacks upon them” and for awakening them “to sense of their own deficiencies, especially in the great matter of education”. The newspaper also attributed him for starting “Anglo-Oriental College” which was of the “same repute as of a college of Oxford or Cambridge”. (The Times, April 6, 1898) Other Newspapers including The Daily Mail, The Echo, The Poll Mall Gazette, The Evening Standard, The People etc. also wrote very high about him and declared him as one of the greatest Indian of the century.

To conclude, Syed as a man demonstrated the oddity of trustworthiness which had become part of his lifestyle. He was faithful to his parents, his family, his friends, his

---

<sup>3</sup> Lytton was one of the most anti-natives Viceroy of India. Because of his policies, there emerged chances of a repeat of the episode of 1857. It is interesting to note that Syed remained silent in the house when the notorious Vernacular Press Act was passed by the Council.

## **Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

acquaintances and even to his servants. In these circumstances how can one imagine that he would not be loyal to his employers from whom he earned his livelihood? It is also a reality that he was inspired by most of the British traditions, especially their emphasis on education. He genuinely thought that the only way forward for the Muslims of South Asia was to follow the path which had already led the British to achieve their glory. He spent most of his life in persuading his people to focus on education and education alone and made educational institutions to help them achieve this goal. However, it is also a truth that he had also realized that very little could be accomplished for his community under the imperial regime without pleasing the colonial masters. He knew that in order to save the honor and well-being of his people and to protect them from total annihilation, he ought to devise a strategy of avoiding a direct conflict with the rulers. He was worried that the other option might result in repetition of what happened to Spanish Muslims during the fourteenth century. So his strategy of loyalism was driven by a combination of his basic personality trait, inspiration for the British practices as well as his realization of their might.

Syed's strategy of loyalism, which he adopted with all sincerity and good intentions to serve his people, paved off as he managed to achieve a lot because of it. In spite of his modest educational background, he reached a position from where he had direct access to the British administrators and policy makers at the highest level. They used to respect him and were willing to give weightage to his opinion. He could plead the case of the Muslims before them and could also earn a lot of concessions for his community. He because of his closeness with the British was able to establish and successfully run his famous Aligarh College, an institution that provided modern education to the Muslim youth and developed them into productive citizens. His policy helped the Muslims to come out from the period of their decline and backwardness, and solved many of their immediate problems and put them back on track. However, one could not shy away from the fact that his policy of pleasing and pleading before the British left a long term negative side-effect on the mindset of the Muslim community in South Asia. In the times to come, many of them instead of relying on their skills and hard-work depended more on gratifying the people in power.

## **References**

- Abbasi, Muhammad Yusuf. 1988. "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan." In *The Muslim Luminaries: Leaders of Religious, Intellectual and Political Revival in South Asia*, 57-106. Islamabad: National Hijra Council.
- Ahmed, Syed Sami. 2002. *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: The Saviour of Muslim India*. Karachi: Royal Book Company.

## Farooq Ahmad Dar

Akhtar, Shamim. 2015. "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and His Audiences." *Social Scientist* 43, no. 1/2, 23-29.

*Aligarh Institute Gazette* (Aligarh)

Aziz, K.K. 1976. *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism*. Islamabad: National Book Foundation.

Baljon, J.M.S. 1964. *The Reform and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.

Begum, Rehmani. 1985. *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: The Politics of Educational Reforms*. Lahore: Vanguard.

Dar, Bashir Ahmad. 1957. *Religious Thoughts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture.

Graham, GFI. 1974. *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmad Khan*. London: Oxford University Press.

Habib, Irfan. 1983. "Syed Ahmad Khan Aur Tarikh Naweesi." In *Aligarh Mera Chaman* edited

by Razia Hamid and Rafat Sultan, 9-27. Bhopal: Babul Ilm Publication.

Hali, Altaf Husain. 2009. *Hayat-e-Javed*. Delhi: Idara-e-Adabiyat-i-Delhi.

Haq, S. Moinul. 1961. "Syed Ahmed Khan." In *A History of Freedom Movement*, Vol. II, Part II. edited by Mahmud Hussain, 451-78. Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society.

Hussain, M. Hadi. 1970. *Syed Ahmed Khan: Pioneer of Muslim Resurgence*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture.

Kareem, Fazale. 2003. *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: Reformer and First Protagonist of Muslim Nationalism*. Karachi: National Book Council of Pakistan.

Kaye, John and G.B. Malleson. 1889. *History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58*. Vol. IV. London: Waterloo Place.

Khan, Syed Ahmad. n.d. *Review on Dr. Hunter's Indian Musalmans: Are they Bond to Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* Lahore: Premier Book House.

Khan, Syed Ahmad. 2009. *Seerat-e-Faridiya*. Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy.

Khawaja, A.M. 1916. *The Early Life of the First Students of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College*. Allahabad.

Malik, Hafeez. 1970. "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Contribution to the Development of Muslim Nationalism in India." *Modern Asian Studies* 4, no. 2, 129-147.

Mirza, Sharafat Husain, ed. *Serkashi-i-Zila Bijnor*. Delhi: Nadwatul Musanefeem.

Muhammad, Shan. 1976. *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Political Biography*. Lahore: Universal Books.

Pasha, Mohamed Abdulla. 1998. *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan: His Life and Times*. Lahore: Ferozsons.

Sayeed, Khalid B. 1998. *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

*Scientific Society Gazette* (Aligarh)

Sherwani, H.K. 1944. "The Political thought of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 4, 306-28.

*The Pioneer* (London)

**Strategy of Loyalism: A Case Study of Syed Ahmad Khan's Relations with the British**

*The Times* (London)