

## **Trending Of Muslim Culture In South Asia: An Analysis Of Modernist And Orthodox Approaches Of Muslim Educational Institutions In British India**

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### **Abstract**

Apart from the oppressive imperialism and its depressive economic repercussions, that the Indians in general and the Muslims in particular had to confront with, after the War of Independence 1857, was hatred towards their culture and imposition of modernism by the British Raj. Interestingly, the challenges were responded not by any political institution but by the educational ones, which with their diverse approaches attempted at giving distinct trends to their respective societies. Aligarh Madrasah Movement adopted and promoted progressivism, rational thinking and loyalism towards the colonial masters. Contrarily, Darul Ulum Deoband Movement remained, for a long, supportive of conventionalism, revolutionary activities, and antagonist of British imperialism and their modernist cultural values. Although contradictory in their vision and philosophies, the both institutional movements aimed at reforming and empowering the Muslim society of South Asia to restore their political stature. This paper attempts at discussing the historical developments of the both educational institutions and the dichotomy of their politico-religious philosophies they endeavored to cultivate among the Muslims of South Asia. It brings in limelight the political phases

and transitions in to their visions, strategies, and nature of politics, from their inceptions to the withdrawal of British from Indian Subcontinent 1947, to popularize themselves and to achieve their assumed objectives. The methodology employed in the discourse is eclectic, i.e. descriptive, analytical, comparative and critical.

**Keywords:** South Asia, British Raj, Imperialism, Modernism, Progressivism, Traditionalism, Education, Culture, Islam, Reformations, Madrasah.

### **Introduction**

The Muslims of South Asia ruled India for almost a millennium, which ultimately ended with the failure of Indian Uprising 1857 against British East India Company and they consequently faced a severe predicament in all social, cultural, economic and political domains. At this time of vulnerability, myriad reformist movements with distinct approaches and vision appeared to rescue the Muslims from further disintegration and degeneration. Those include Aligarh Movement founded by Sir Ahmad Khan in 1875, Darul Ulum Deoband by Maulana Qasim Nanautavi in 1866, Anjuman-e Hamayat-e Islam by Khalifa Hamid-ud-Din in 1884, and Nadavatul Ulema by Maulana Muhammad Ali Almongiri in 1894. One thing common among of these organizations/ movements was that they made education a strategy to achieve their goals.

This paper, nonetheless, goes into two movements: the one is Aligarh movement launched by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, which adhere to loyalism, modernism and progressivism, and advocated for the scientific and technological education as a remedy to the plight of Indian Muslims. Other one is Darul Ulum Deoband movement whose founder were adherent to the ideology and philosophy of Shah Wali Allah Muhaddis Dehlawi (b. 1703-d. 1762). This movement was staunch opponent of British imperialism and process of modernization in India; it, thus, perceiving threats to Islam cultural and religious integrity popularized conservatism and orthodoxy. This papers gives an evaluation to the socio-political circumstances in which these movement emerged, vision and ideologies they promoted, the strategies they adopted to achieve their goals, and the services they rendered to uplift the desperate India Muslim masses, and the services and contributing they made to develop a new culture while recognizing the challenges of late nineteenth and early half of twentieth Century CE.

The methodology of this discourse is eclectic—a combination of descriptive, analytical, comparative and critical. The discussion presented in the paper is mainly divided into three parts: first discusses the emergence and contribution of Aligarh movement; second, those of Deoband movement; third and lost part provide a critical and comparative analysis to the modernist and orthodox approaches of these movements.

It would be rather more appropriate to start up with getting an understanding of the socio-political milieu in which these movements appeared.

### **The Plight of Muslims of South Asia after War of Independence 1857**

The condition of Indian Muslims after the War of Independence 1857 were identically depressed and immeasurable, since the British held the Muslims more responsible for the outbreak of war than the Hindus. In wake of harsh treatment of British towards the Muslims, they turned to be a backward minority community of India. Their illiteracy and desperate ignorance in all arenas of social and political life was discernable. It was the time when they had been a deprived and marginalized segment of Indian society, they were prone to defend and protect their basic rights even. Their economic, political, social decay and more importantly the maligning of their religious and cultural history, values and identity by orientalist historiographic discourse were the most serious changes they were confronting in this period.

In such conditions, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan came forward and tried to help the Muslims come out from such deplorable and miserable conditions. He guided the Muslims towards the right path and attempted to draw out the Muslims from such helpless condition. He started a movement in order to give respectable position to Muslims in society as they had in past, this movement is known as Aligarh Movement.

### **Founder of the Aligarh Movement: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898)**

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was a prominent Muslim reformer, theologian, modernist scholar, rationalist thinker, prolific writer and politician blessed with vast scrupulous far-sightedness. Syed Ahmed was born in Delhi on 17 October 1817, and raised in a family having unfathomable relations with Mughal Court. He came from a wealthy family, well-adored and respected in the region. His father Syed Muttaqi Mohammad was an adviser to Emperor Akbar II, whereas his grandfather Syed Hadi Alamgir was influential in the Mughal court. His father took special steps to ensure that he got high-quality schooling. Taking avid interest in his educational activities, he learned Quran, Persian, Arabic, Mathematics and Medicine. He deciding to leave his traditional course went on to study privately. He had a particular interest in literature. Upon his father died, Syed Ahmad Khan entered the East India Company as a clerk and eventually became a judge of the local court. He actually received conventional education but his educational service was regarded to be a hallmark of modern education and training for the Muslim Community of South Asia.

Sir Syed was serving as Chief Judge in Bijnaur when the War of Independence eventually broke out in 1857 and is said to have rescued the life of many English women and children during this time of chaos and unrest. The British gave him an estate with a high income in exchange for his allegiance, but he declined the offer. In Muradabad, he was appointed as Chief Justice and later was transferred to Ghazipore. He was moved to Aligarh in 1864, where he played a major role in setting up a new college. He resigned from his law work in 1876 and focused on establishing and running the college, devoting his entire energies to improving the socio-political status of South Asian Muslims through education.

Explaining the aims of establishing Aligarh College, Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar (1878-1931) who was an eminent student of the Aligarh College, a co-founder of Jamia Millia Islamia, and a

leading exponent of Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) said that it was founded “to create for young Muslims a center with the true Islamic atmosphere, so that its alumni would not merely be the educated and cultured men, but educated and cultured Musalmans.”<sup>1</sup> Eventually, Aligarh Movement becoming a center of Muslim Renaissance in South Asia played immensely a significant role in determining the future course of their political objectives and activities and making the pertinent accomplishments.

### **Well-reputed Intellectual Works of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wrote various books, the purpose of which was to develop a sense of modernization and rational thinking among Indian Muslims. His undertakings include inter alia: Tafsirul Quran [Exegesis of Quran], Khutbat-e Ahmadiya [Sermons of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan], Ahkam Tu'am Ahl-e Kittab [Ordinances about the Question of Eating with The People of the Book], Izalatul Ghain An Zulkarnain He intended to remove the doubts and distrust between the colonial masters and the Muslims. For this, he wrote Rasala-e Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind [A Pamphlet on Cause of Indian Revolt], which contends that The Great Revolt of 1857 was not a systematic conspired war of Indian against East India Company, nor it broke out by the assistance of Russia and Iran. Rather, the British themselves are responsible for this uprising, and those were the oppressive policies of the government and its indifference to plight of the common masses which enhanced anger and frustration among Indians soldiers of the Company and common people which caused this disturbing event.<sup>2</sup> A critic of Urdu literature and an editor of the Sir Syed's Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind, Professor Moinuddin Aqeel (b. 1946) admiring this enterprise states: After the Revolt, he penned the book The Causes of the Indian Mutiny – a daring critique, at the time, of British policies that he blamed for causing the uprising.”<sup>3</sup> Tafsir al-Quran is the exegesis of Quran by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, in which he attempted at providing naturalist (scientific) explanations of the Quranic verses and the historical event described in them. For denying the divine interference and miracles in course of history, the author attracted severe criticism of the orthodox theologians of Islam.

Izalatul Ghain An Zulkarnain is an interpretation on the Quranic verse that tells the story of “Zulqarnain.” Sir Syed attempted to dispel some of the common myths of the time that were not supported by the Quran. Zulqarnain, he thus states, was the name of the emperor or king who ruled over a large portion of the country. Sir Syed went into greater detail about the name of “Zulqarnain” and inquired about the history of pre-Islam Arab deities.

In his Akham-e Tuam Ahl-e Kitab, Syed Ahmad explains whether Muslims are permitted to eat food with non-Muslims or Englishmen. He wrote an extensive treatise based on his understanding on Quranic verses, Prophet's traditions, and Muslim jurists' opinions, and suggests that Muslims

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<sup>1</sup> Mushirul Hasan, “Aligarh's Notre Eminent Contemporary: Assessing Syed Ahmad Khan's Reformist Agenda,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 19, (May 9-15, 1998), 1077-1081.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind* [Causes of Indian Revolt] (Lahore: Matbua-e Mustafa Press, 1978). Apart from this book which discusses the causes of the mutiny, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan also penned the event of the mutiny in another book titled *Tarikh-e Sarkashi-i Bijnore* [History of the Mutiny of Bijnore District].

<sup>3</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind*,

should eat the food cooked by the British in their utensils. Further, they can also eat the animal or bird slaughtered by the People who are given a divine book by Allah Almighty.

### **Promotion of Loyalist Culture and Naturalist Rationality among Muslims of South Asia**

The approaches adopted and propagated by Sir Syed Ahmad, loyalism towards the British Raj and naturalist interpretations of Islam received stern criticism by orthodox circles of his age and even afterwards. He however was convinced that the Muslims did not possess enough technological and scientific potential to combat with the British, and hence were unable to reinstate their declining political status by offering militant resistances. He consequently adopted and advised the Indian Muslims to adopt the loyalism towards the British Raj so as to achieve reconciliation between the Muslims' struggle to uplift their socio-economic status and the administrative and development policies of the British government. He instructed the Indian Muslims to get modern education so that they could get government jobs, particularly in ICS and judiciary.

To modernize the Indian Muslims, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan provided Islamic injections a naturalist or scientific interpretations, for which he received harsh criticism from his contemporary religious scholars, and for most theologians of present times his interpretations of Islam are still unaccepted. For many of his beliefs and naturalist interpretations of Holy Quran, he has been subject to ulema's stern criticism and they consider him a kafir (unbeliever). Sir Syed, nonetheless, argues in justification of his undertakings that Quran is the word of God, and the nature is the work of God, and they both can never be in contradiction.<sup>4</sup>

### **Contribution of Aligarh Movement Apropos of Socio-cultural and Educational Reformation**

It was after the War of Independence or Great Revolt 1857 that the Muslim of India suffered from intense predicament socially, culturally and political. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was such a thinker who perceived that this decline of Indian Muslims is because of their emotional attachment with the religion rather than rational and scientific. He thought that the Muslims can never gain a respectable social and political status until they acquire scientific and technological learning, nor can they improve their economic conditions without these advancements. Moreover, he was convinced that any confrontation with colonial master would bring for the Muslims nothing but troubles and erosion. Consequently, he started reform Indian Muslim society by promoting among them western knowledges, and by reconciling their religio-cultural character with that of the British who had established a Great Empire by colonizing various countries of America in seventeenth century, Australia in eighteenth century, and those of South Asia, Africa in nineteenth Century.<sup>5</sup> This reformation, in Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's opinion, could only be possible by bring the Muslim society of India out of religious orthodoxy and synthesizing Islam with westernized modern value system. Mazharuddin Siddiqi thus states, "The basic motive behind Sir Sayyid's

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<sup>4</sup> Abdul Ali and Sayyid Ahsan, *Contribution of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to Islamic Studies: Seminar Papers* (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 2005), 100.

<sup>5</sup> See, John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

religious ideology seems to have been a keen desire to effect a religious reformation in the Muslim world parallel to Protestant Reformation in Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

The founder of Aligarh Movement, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan endorsed religious innovations and denounced traditional ways of dealing with socio-political challenges. Historian and former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi from 2004 to 2009, Professor Mushirul Hasan (1949-2018) paying him a tribute states that:

“For a man tutored in feudal family that had experienced the trauma of declining Mughal Empire, he was high pragmatic and realistic in his orientation and attitude. For a man tutored in Islamic learning, he was remarkably broad-minded and forward-looking. He was a visible symbol of Muslim regeneration, a catalyst of social and educational reforms.... He possessed the intellectual sources to reconcile matters of faith with more immediate task of rescuing the Muslims from their downward spiral. He laid stress on interpretation and not conformity, on innovation rather than blind acceptance of Islamic Law.”<sup>7</sup>

Though majority Muslim masses still make Sir Syed’s interpretations of Islam a subject of criticism, he opened the ways of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) which later on emphasized by a Muslim nationalist ideologue Allama Muhammad Iqbal as a remedy for the Muslim facing political decline in South Asia or in rest of the world.

### **Cultural Legacy of Aligarh Movement**

Aligarh Movement under Sir Syed Ahmad Khan although received severe criticism from the orthodox circles of Muslim theologians, it acquired a contribution of numbers of Muslim ideologues and left enormous socio-political and cultural legacy for Indian Muslims. It produced towering personalities who gave rise to Urdu language and literature. The figures like Baba e Urdu Maulvi Abdul Haq (1870-1961), whose extraordinary contribution in the genesis and growth of Urdu journalism in Colonial India is impressive and unforgettable, was a product of this very movement and institution. The most prominent defenders of Muslims’ rights including Nawab Muhsin-ul-Muluk (1837-1907) and Nawab Waqar-ul-Muluk (1841-1917) who founded All India Muslim League in 1906 were associated with Aligarh Movement. A renowned Pakistani historian, Professor Sharif Al-Mujahid (1926-2020) states:

“Within a brief span of some fifty years between 1880s and 1930s, three outstanding Muslim leaders who had so enthusiastically started out as staunch Indian nationalists, ended up finally at strong threshold of Muslim nationalism. In the ultimate analysis, their pragmatic shift from one end of political spectrum to the other was responsible for Muslims carving out themselves a separate destiny and an independent state of their own of India’s body politics. They were Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Allama Iqbal, and Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah.

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<sup>6</sup> Mazharuddin Siddiqi, “Religious Thoughts of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (September 1967), 289.

<sup>7</sup> Mushirul Hasan, “Aligarh’s Notre Eminent Contemporary: Assessing Syed Ahmad Khan’s Reformist Agenda,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 19, (May 9-15, 1998), 1077-1081.

Jinnah became a founding father of Pakistan, Iqbal poet-philosopher and ideologue, and Sir Syed, though hardly perceptible at the time, the founder of Muslim nationalism.”<sup>8</sup>

Besides the evolution of Muslim nationalism which led to the foundation of All India Muslim League and consequently the creation of Pakistan, another vital legacy of the Aligarh Movement was developing of Marxist and Communist movement in Colonial India. The intellectuals belonging to Progressive Writers Association such as Khawaja Ahmad Abbas (1914-1984),<sup>9</sup> Sardar Jaffari (1913-2000),<sup>10</sup> Bari Alig and Sibte Hassan (1916-1986)<sup>11</sup> came from Aligarh University.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the pioneer of Marxist historiographical trends in South Asian like Muhammad Habib (1895-1971), his son Irfan Habib (1931) and Mashirul Hassan (1949-2018) were such historians who produced historical enterprises focusing on secular, pluralistic and anti-communal perspectives on Indian history.

## II

There were many individuals and schools of thoughts among the Muslims who did not conform to the approach of Aligarh Movement, rather were furiously critical of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Yet, it was the Darul Ulum Deoband envisaged the alternate set-up of socio-cultural reformation of Indian Muslims and devised novel strategies to rescuing their declining status. This part of the paper goes into the foundation and ideological raison d'être of Darul Ulum Deoband, as well as its contribution and strategies to strength the confidence of Indian Muslim masses and to preserve Islamic culture in India. Moreover, this part also sheds light on devising new strategies by this traditional religious institution to be a renaissance movement, and simultaneously adopting and trending novel cultural trends in the Muslim society, while becoming the part of the process of

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<sup>8</sup> Sharif Al Mujahid, “Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Muslim Nationalism in India,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (Spring, 1999), 87-101.

<sup>9</sup> A journalist, film director, screenwriter, and novelist, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas was born on June 7, 1914, in Panipat, Haryana, to a prominent family. Abbas was home-schooled as a kid before attending Hali Muslim High School at Panipat. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature in 1933 and a Bachelor of Laws in 1935 from Aligarh Muslim University (L.L.B). According to researcher Showkat Hussain Itoo, his paternal grandfather, Khawaja Ghulam Abbas, was a participant in the 1857 rebellion against the British and the first martyr of Panipat, who was blasted from the muzzle of a cannon. His maternal grandfather was the chief protégé of illustrious Urdu poet Mirza Asad Allah Khan Ghalib.

<sup>10</sup> A popular Urdu poet, Ali Sardar Jafri was born and raised in Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh. The poets who influenced his intellect included Josh Malihabadi (1898-1982), Jigar Moradabadi (1890-1960), and Firaq Gorakhpuri (1896-1982). He was admitted to Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 1933, where he was subjected to Communist ideology and expelled from the university in 1936 for ‘racial reasons.’ He did, however, graduate from Delhi University's Zakir Husain College (Delhi College) in 1938, but his postgraduate studies at Lucknow University were cut short when he was arrested in 1940–41 for writing anti-war poetry and participating in political activities organized by the Indian National Congress as Secretary of Student's Union of the university.

<sup>11</sup> Sibte Hasan was born in Ambari Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India, on July 31, 1912. Aligarh Muslim University was his alma mater. He attended Columbia University in the United States for further education. Sibte Hasan became a member of the Communist Party of India in 1942. He moved to Pakistan after India was partitioned. He has worked as an editor for prestigious publications such as Naya Adab and Lail-o-Nehar. On April 20, 1986, while returning from a conference in India, he died of a heart attack in New Delhi. He was laid to rest in Karachi.

<sup>12</sup> Mushirul Hasan, “AMU Part 2: Why Were So Many Intellectuals in Aligarh Drawn to Marxism?” *The Citizen*, (June 10, 2018), at <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/4/14068/AMU-Part-2-Why-Were-So-Many-Intellectuals-in-Aligarh-Drawn-to-Marxism-> (dated: April 28, 2021).

modern modernization and political process the British Raj introduced in India, adoption of English bureaucratic organizational structure for an institution providing traditional religious education, and establishing a networking myriad organization working for political interests of Indian Muslims, doing missionary activities and guiding them to order their socio-cultural affairs according to Islamic code of ethics.

### **Historical Context and Ideological Raison d'être of the Foundation of Darul Ulum Deoband**

Established by Indian Muslim community after the War of Independence 1857, Darul Ulum Deoband was one of those Muslim educational institutions which aimed at restoring the declining moral of the community by educating them in accordance with the teachings and philosophy of Shah Wali Allah Muhaddis Dehlawi (b. 1703-d. 1762), and preserving their culture against the stream of British imperialism and the modernism they after attaining the political hold of India wanted to inculcate among Indian masses. It anticipated and struggled for reforming the Muslim society by virtue of educating them in traditional religious education and value system, and that they would regain their lost status. Besides that, the factor which further contributed to the foundation of this madrasah was the aspirations of Indian Muslim theologians to respond and counter the Christian missionary activities and Hindu reformist movements such as Shuddhi and Sanghathan formed with an agenda of reforming and consolidating the Hindus on Vedic lines—so to say Arya Samaj, and converting the Muslim population to be the Hindu.<sup>13</sup> Motivated to achieve these objectives, the revered Muslim theologians who are accredited to be the founders of the madrasah included inter alia: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (b. 1826-d. 1905), Muhammad Yaqub Nanautavi (b. 1833-d. 1884), Shah Rafi al-Din (b. 1836-d. 1890), Sayyid Muhammad Abid (b. 1834-d. 1912), Zulfiqar Ali (b. 1819-d. 1904), Fadhl al-Rahman Usmani (b. 1831-d. 1907) and Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi (d. 1832-d. 1880). The madrasah started its first class in Chatta Masque in 1866 with the only teacher Mullah Mahmud (d. 1886) and a student Mahmud al-Hasan (b. 1851-d. 1920) who later on headed the Deoband movement and got recognized as Shaykh al-Hind for his devotional character and contribution to the very school of thought.

### **Structural Modernization of Darul Ulum Deoband Making the Traditional Education Popular**

Although the founding fathers of the madrasah were committed to advance the traditional Islamic education to the Indian Muslim community, they adopted and introduced new strategies to make it popular. Apropos of this, they devised three major innovative strategies: 1) reliance of the public financial donations; 2) the emulation of English organizational and bureaucratic structure of educational institutions; 3) introducing the Urdu as medium of instruction.

Diverging from the traditional educational institutions that used to be financially dependent on the ruling classes and the Muslim elites, Darul Ulum accepted the donations from common public. This policy won the favors of common masses and sense of belongingness, and further it blocked the ways of external influence in the administrative and policy matters of the madrasah. The

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<sup>13</sup> See, Geoffrey A.Oddie, *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversions and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991).



emulation of English administrative bureaucratic structure facilitated the madrasah compete with any other educational institution in India, and showed how the exponents of Deoband movement were acquiescent and flexible towards accepting those aspects of British modernization which they consider were not detrimental to their ideological cause but could facilitate it. Another immensely significant facet of modernization in the movement was introduction of Urdu as the medium of learning. This innovative initiative conspicuously played a significant role in flagrant defiance of the monopoly of those theologians who were well-versed in Arabic and Persian to provide religious education. The common people who see themselves alienated from Islamic teaching owing to the Persian and Arabic lexicon felt it more intelligible and accessible, and this contributed in increasing the strength of madrasah's students. The acceptance of the non-Muslim students by Darul Ulum also speaks volumes of its liberal attitude and softer image as to religious harmony in the subcontinent.

### **Historical Phases of Anti-imperialist Struggle**

Highly inspired by the teaching of Shah Wali Allah, the exponents of the Darul Ulum Movement holding the British East India Company responsible for the most terrible political predicament of the South Asian Muslims remained always committed to demonstrate resistance against the British Raj in India. Its struggle against British imperial can broadly be defined in three historical phases: first, the militant insurgence of its founding fathers in the Great Mutiny of 1857; second, the 'Silk Letter Conspiracy' on the part of its main exponents to overthrow British government with the help of Turkey, Germany, Afghanistan and Indian princely states; third, Darul Ulum's participation in mainstream democratic politics and demanding for the freedom of United India.

### **Founding Fathers' Insurgence against British Imperialism**

Its founding father such as Maulana Qasim Nanautavi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi under the leadership of the teacher Imdad Allah Mahajar Makki (d. 18017-d. 1899) participated in the Great Mutiny 1857 against British East India Company, and demonstrating their skillful militant strategies succeeded to capture the Town of Shamil in district Muzaffarnagar.<sup>14</sup> These freedom fighters later on arrested, Haji Imdad Allah Makki, however, was allowed by the British to move on to the Hijaz, and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi went on the trial but for the lack of sufficient evidences was released. Maulana Qasim Nanautavi managed to make his getaway from both the trial and imprisonment altogether.<sup>15</sup> After that they setup Darul Ulum Deoband, they kept themselves at distance from political activism so as to evade the checkout and hostility British government of India. They decided it for the apprehension that their first responsibility was to strengthen the Muslim community, otherwise they could never succeed in overthrowing the British rule.

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<sup>14</sup> Maulana Muhammad Tayyab, *Tarikh-e Darul Ulum Deoband* [History of Deoband] (Karachi: Maktabah Darul Ulum, 1972) 53-54.

<sup>15</sup> Aziz Ahmad, "Role of Ulema in Indo-Muslim History," *Studia Islamica*, No. 31 (1970), 11.

### **Clandestine Insurgency: Reyshami Romal (Silk Letter) Movement**

Despite Darul Ulum showed no apparent political activism, the freedom fighters belonging to it continued their clandestine insurgent activities. Its dignitaries announced the formation a religious political party Jamiyat al-Ansar in 1911, they had, nonetheless, formed it far earlier from the date of its announcement. It was Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindhi who on the advice of Maulana Mahmud Hassan had setup it but kept its activities clandestine owing to avoid the British vigilance. The party was consisted of old students of Deoband Madrasah had a program on larger scale—not merely confined to India, but across the Muslims including Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Bukhara and various other Arab countries.<sup>16</sup> Though its exact agenda is still unknown, it seems to have been established with some pan-Islamic political objectives in Indian context: staging revolt in India against the British by gaining the help from the Muslim countries.<sup>17</sup>

When the World War I starts, Shaykh al-Hind Mahmud al-Hasan viewing this development in international affairs a crucial juncture decided to instigate the anti-British mass movement in India. In Makkah, Shaykh al-Hind met with Ghalib Pasha, one of the most influential governors of Ottoman Empire. Pasha urged him to gather mass support from India against the British in context to ongoing war, and wrote a long letter asking Indian Muslims to revolt against British imperialism and stand for snatching their political might that they lost to the oppressors. Shaykh al-Hind sent Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindhi to Kabul to gather and organize the strength of exiled revolutionaries and stage a strong revolutionary movement with the help of Indian masses across the subcontinent.<sup>18</sup> The message written on the silk cloth to spread among the supports was caught timely by the British government and they failed this uprising. British dubbed this movement as “Silk Letter Conspiracy.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Getting into Mainstream Politics and Adherence to Composite Nationalism or Muslim Separatism**

It was after the failure of the Great Revolt 1857 and Silk Letter Conspiracy that the leadership of Deoband decided to change its anti-imperialist strategies by leaving the militant struggle and coming into the mainstream politics. They, thus, extended their wholehearted support to Indian National Congress as to the Khilafat Movement as well as Non-cooperation Movement. This time, the leadership being convinced of taking part in the democratic political process the British introduced in India formed a political party called Jamiyat Ulama-e Hind in 1919. The founders of the party included Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957), Kifayat Allah Dehlawi (1875-1952), and Maulana Ahmed Ali Lahori (1887-1962), Anwar Shah Kashmiri (1875-1933), Abdul Haq Akodwi (1912-1988), Abdul Halim Siddiqui, and Abdul Bari Firangi Mahali (1878-1926). The cooperation

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<sup>16</sup> For details see, Hajjan Sheikh, *Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindhi: A Revolutionary Scholar* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1986), 15-18.

<sup>17</sup> Tariq Hassan, *Colonialism and Call to Jihad in British India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015), 5, 90-93.

<sup>18</sup> Sheikh, *Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindhi: A Revolutionary Scholar*, 69-81.

<sup>19</sup> Maulana Muhammad Miyan (Comp.), *Silken Letters Movement: Accounts of 'Silken Handkerchief Letters Conspiracy Case' From British Records*, Trans. (Eng.) Muhammad Allah Qasimi (New Delhi: Shaikhul Hind Academy, 2012) 3-4.

between Jamiyat Ulama-e Hind and Indian National Congress proved long-lasting, as the former supported the ideas of Indian nationalism and opposed the “Two Nations Theory” which the All India Muslim League propagated for the creation of separate Muslim state named Pakistan. The supporters of the Indian nationalist idea in the Deoband School argued that Two Nations Theory and formation of Pakistan would result in division of the Muslims as well and will lead to making the Muslim left in India further vulnerable and exploited. Darul Ulum, thus, endorsed secular politics in India.

It nonetheless would be off-beam to declare Darul Ulum’s politics secular and Indian nationalist altogether. A forward block among Deoband School led by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi (b. 1963-d. 1943) emerged extending its support to All India Muslim League and its demand for the formation of Pakistan. This group included the towering personality such as Maulana Shabir Ahmad Usmani (b. 1887-d. 1949), Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani (b. 1892-d. 1974), Maulana Murtaza Hasan Chandpuri (1868-1951), Maulana Shah Abd al-Ghani Pholpuri (b. 1876), Mufti Muhammad Shafi Deobandi (b. 1897-d. 1976), Maulana Mufti Muhammad Hassan Amritsari (b. 1880-d. 1961),<sup>20</sup> and Maulana Khair Muhammad Jalandhari (b. 1895).<sup>21</sup>

### **Legacy of Darul Ulum Deoband**

Emerged for renaissance and reformation of Indian Muslim society, Darul Ulum Deoband was not merely a religious educational institution but a movement which adopted dynamic political maneuvering to achieve its objectives, which made it one of the popular religio-political movement in South Asia, and also help it appear as one the most professed sect of Islam in the Muslim World. Following the philosophy and teachings of Shah Wali Allah, it started its mission to disseminate orthodox religious education among Indian Muslims, and from the failure of Great Revolt 1857 to 1920 simultaneously kept engaged in covert planning and attempt at overthrowing British Raj through militant means. It nonetheless came into mainstream politics by forming a political party Jamiyat Ulama-e Hind in 1919, endorsing the Khilafat Movement, and extended their support to Mahatma Gandhi for his Non-cooperation Movement against British Raj. Although the most of its exponents remained political ally of the Indian National Congress adhering to Indian composite nationalism, secular politics and freedom on United India, a group of its theologians diverging from non-communal politics endorsed Jinnah and All India Muslim’s demand for separate Muslim state, i.e. Pakistan. This is how they secured favorable and influential political positioning among the Muslim masses of both states, India and Pakistan. Jamiyat Ulama-e Islam a political party of Deoband School of thought diverging from Jamiyat Ulama-e Hind supported Two Nations

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<sup>20</sup> He was a great admirer and disciple of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi. After migrating from Indian, he settled in Lahore where he setup a famous religious seminary after the name of his teacher, i.e. Jamia Ashafia in September 1947. See, “Mufti Muhammad Hassan (RA) Founder of Jamia Ashrafia,” at <http://ashrafia.org.pk/founder.html> (dated September 6, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Mufti Jameel Ahmad Thanavi, “Tamir-e Pakistan mein Ulema ka Kardar” [The Role of Ulema in Formation of Pakistan] in Muhammad Akbar Shah Bukhari, *Tehrik-e Pakistan Aur Ulema-e Deoband* [Pakistan Movement and Theologians from Deoband] (Karachi: Dar al-A’shat, n.d.), 7-12.

Theory and demand for Pakistan, and later on played an influential role in constitution making process of the Pakistan, bidding the legislative assemble to make no law against Islamic teaching enshrined in Quran and Sunnah.

The conversion of the Muslims to Christianity or Hinduism was perceived by the Deobandi theologians as a great threat to Muslims' existence and their socio-cultural status in South Asia. They were highly anxious of the activities of the Christian missionaries and Hindu reformist movements, Deobandi theologian Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi (1885-1944) formed a proselytizing organization called Tablighi Jamat in 1926,<sup>22</sup> which was and is continued to be a non-political organization aimed at preaching the fundamental concepts of Islam to the Muslims masses and endeavor to keep them connected with Islam by asking them to perform the basic religious and social obligations that their religion describes. This Deobandi missionary organization was established to play a counterweighing role against Hindu missionary movements Sangathan and Shuddhi (meaning purification) initiated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), who was the founder of Araya Samaj, an organization aimed at converting Indian Muslims to Hinduism. Tablighi Jamat hence was another dimension of Deobandi movement towards containing and countering the Christian and Hindu missionary activities and preserving Muslim culture in South Asia.

Recounting these political developments of Hindu consciousness and Muslims' reaction to them, Yoginder Sikand sets it out that: "One of the most salient developments in the 1920s was the launching of the shuddhi movement by the Arya Samaj to bring into the Hindu fold various groups considered outside the pale of what had now come to be defined as 'Hinduism', including untouchables and, later, Muslim, Christian and even Sikh communities."<sup>23</sup> Discussing the counteraction of the Indian Muslim community over such perturbing ideological campaign of Arya Samaj, he adds, "The Arya shuddhi campaign provoked Muslim leaders and groups to respond, and this took the form of various tablighi or Islamic missionary initiatives intended to counter the Arya Samaj's conversion drive and, going further, to attempt to spread Islam among non-Muslims as well."<sup>24</sup> This therefore becomes evident that Deoband theologians being anxious of the political vulnerability of the Indian Muslim community and threats to their religious and cultural integrity launched the a counterweighing organization Tablighi Jamat which indeed played a vital role in restoring the confidence to the Indian Muslim.

Darul Ifta is another dimension of Deoband movement as to preserving culture and ordering the social life of Indian Muslims. This institution is formed to establish a system of giving individual

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<sup>22</sup> To know more details on the history, ideology and working of Tablighi Jamat, the following books may be consulted: Zacharias Pieri, *Tablighi Jamaat* (Lapido Media, 2012); Zia us Salam, *Inside the Tablighi Jamaat* (Harper Collins India, 2020); Jan. A. Ali and Rizwan Sahib, *A Sociological Study of Tablighi Jama'at: Working for Allah* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Syed Talibur Rehman, *Tablighi Jamaat: Tarikh-Aqayad* [Tablighi Jamaat: History and Beliefs] (Maktaba Bayt al-Islam al-Riyaz, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Yoginder Sikand, "Muslim reactions to the shuddhi campaign in early twentieth century North India" in *The Milli Gazette*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (January, 2000) at <https://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15012001/Art26.htm> (dated: June 4, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> Sikand, "Muslim reactions to the shuddhi campaign in early twentieth century North India."

Fatwa, which means a ruling by some Islamic jurist on socio-economic and religious issues. M. Riyaz Hashami giving a critical examination to the working, contribution and progress of this institution mentions it that:

“The Darul Uloom, established in 1892, has a wing called the Darul Ifta, which has been dedicated for the past 125 years to issuing fatwas. Never mind their purpose or relevance, the Darul Ifta receives nearly 15,000 fatwa requests from various countries every year. Of these, some 6,000-7,000 fatwas are sought online. ‘Solutions’ are sought on issues pertaining to faith, duty, agreements/ settlements, what is permissible or forbidden in Islam....”<sup>25</sup>

Issuing individual fatwa in its present form, thus, is trended by the Deoband movement, which the ulema belong to other religious institutions and schools of thought are following it as well. The general masses are influenced a great deal by the system of fatwa, resolving their day-to-day problems and organizing themselves economically and socially, particular they have to interact with non-Muslim communities or societies.

### III

#### **Critical Analysis of Modernist Approach of Aligarh and Orthodoxy of Darul Ulum Deoband Movements**

Although, the both movements emerged intended to rescue the Indian Muslims from the predicament that they faced after the abolishing of Mughal Empire and British takeover of the political and administrative affairs of India, they movement contributed to uplift the Muslim masses differently. Aligarh movement adopted the policy of reconciliation with imperialist structure of British raj, whereas the proponents of Deoband movement remained always unwilling to accept British rule and the modernism they introduced in India. They thus showed resistance to the British raj either covertly or overtly. This segment of the paper gives a critical evaluation to the ideological, structural and strategical difference of both movements.

#### **Justifications to Modernist and Orthodox Approaches**

The founder of Aligarh movement, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s reconciliatory approach developed from the realization that the Muslim community, vis-à-vis British raj, were not capable, developed and disciplined enough to regain their previous status. The Great Revolt of 1857, he thought, proved that the militant resistance of Indians against British would not bring positive results, as the latter were well-equipped with scientific and technological advancements. Contrarily, the founders of Darul Ulum Deoband were staunch adherent to by the philosophy of Shah Wali Allah, and some of them had participated in the revolt. They were convinced of that the Indian Muslims

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<sup>25</sup> M. Riyaz Hashmi, “Uttar Pradesh: Darul Uloom Deoband’s fresh decrees revive debate over relevance of fatwas” *India Today*, November 10, 2017. At <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20171120-darul-uloom-deoband-fatwas-eyebrows-posting-pictures-uttar-pradesh-1083409-2017-11-10> (dated, March 16, 2021). See also: [http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Muslim\\_personal\\_law:India\\_\(fatwas\)#Darul\\_Uloom\\_Deoband.27s\\_fatwas](http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Muslim_personal_law:India_(fatwas)#Darul_Uloom_Deoband.27s_fatwas) (dated March 16, 2021).

should have protect and strengthen Islamic cultural and values, and consolidate themselves through developing the faith and traditionalist knowledge.

### **Traditionalist and Modern Education**

The fundamental reason of the contemporary problems of Muslims' decline and predicament, in the view of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, was the socio-cultural and education stagnation. As he believed that without modern education no nation could acquire better socio-political status, he advocated and the scientific and technological education for the Indians and attempted at popularize subjects of that genre in the educational institutions founded by him.<sup>26</sup> In defiance of modern education, Darul Ulum Deoband however stuck up for the traditional and conventional knowledge learnt by the student across the Muslim World including inter alia: tafsir (exegesis), asol-e tafsir (the principles of exegesis), hadith (tradition), asol-e hadith (principles of tradition), serf-o nahw (conjugation and syntax), Arabi Adab (Urabic Literature), mantaq (logic), falsafa (philosophy), fiqah (Islamic jurisprudence), ilm-e biyan (rhetoric), ilm-e kalam (dialect), hiyat (nature), ilm-o al-fraiz (obligations).<sup>27</sup> The reason behind imparting such kind of education was the anxiety of the ulema over that the modernism propagated by the British raj would eliminated Islamic culture values and respect for traditional knowledges.

The syllabus taught at Darul Ulum remained a subject of controversy. Initially, Maulana Qasim Nanutwi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi opposed teaching logic and philosophy to the students of madrassah, they did it for two reasons: first, they wanted to reduce the eight year degree program into six years, so that the passed out students could take the responsibility of tutoring the students in other madrassahs as soon as possible. Second, they thought these subject are not worth reading, Gangohi strongly opposed teaching of logic stating that English (which could never be revered by the ulema) is far better that logic and philosophy, as it could help gain worldly benefits.<sup>28</sup> Untill 1893, Darul Ulum did not include these subjects to be taught to the students enrolled the coursework of Dars-i-Nizam and on the criticism from within the orthodox circles it resorted the previous syllabus of it.

### **Adaptation of English vs. Vernacular Languages**

Languages appeared to be a symbol of cultural and ideological representation; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan went for English as medium of instruction and Deoband theologians for the vernacular. Khan criticized the vernacular as medium of instruction in the educational institutions established by the

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<sup>26</sup> See, David Lelyveld, "Naicari Nature: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Reconciliation of Science, Technology and Religion," in Yasmin Shaikia and M. Raisur Rehman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 69-87, Muhammad Ashraf, "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Vision of Scientific Education," *Center for Islamic Pluralism* (February 19, 2016) at: [Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan's Vision of Scientific Education: The Aligarh Movement and Educational Modernization of South Asian Muslims :: Center for Islamic Pluralism](#) (dated, June 5, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Maulana Muhammad Tayyab, *Tarikh-e Darul Ulum Deoband* [History of Darul Ulum Deoband] (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 1973), 34-47.

<sup>28</sup> Rashid Ahmad, *Darul Ulum Deoband: Bartanvi Hind mein Musalmano ka Nizam-e Talim, Eik Naqidana Ja'iza* [Darul Ulum Deoband: A Critical Analysis of Muslim Education System in British India] Vol. 1, (Lahore: Maktabah Jadid Press, 2004), 126-131.

British raj, he accordingly wrote an essay and published in both Urdu and English criticizing the vernacular school of the government. He explained that the government perhaps established the vernacular schools on the grounds that the vernaculars facilitate native people in their process of learning and this technique will secure their time from learn the rules of some other language. Evidently, there were the precedents showing the success of this this strategy, as the European and Arab nations learnt myriad knowledges in the native languages. Khan however objected on this educational policy stating that the government had overlooked the fact that the vernacular are not capable enough to convey the meaning and messages of what is being taught. He further stated that in various schools Urdu had been adopted as medium of instruction. He became critical of Urdu as medium of instruction in government schools on three grounds: first, it, he states, must have been recognized whether the book in a language adopted to deliver knowledge are available or not. Without availability of the books in vernacular, the education is not possible. Second, whether the vernacular had enough potential for book publications. Third, whether these languages capable of developing their capacity and potential of the students as to the subjects they were studying. He concludes his discourse on the point that government should replace Urdu with the language (English) which could produce the required results.<sup>29</sup> Later on, on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1867, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, nonetheless, started a campaign for a vernacular university writing a request on behalf of British Indian Association North-western districts to Viceroy and Governor General demanding a vernacular university that impart education in myriad disciplines in native languages.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, Darul Ulum Deoband popularized religious education by adopting Urdu as medium of instruction. This had far-reaching impact on socio-religious environment of South Asia. This would have been the first instance that Urdu became a medium of communication in madrassah education, instead of Arabic or Farsi (i.e. Persian). This however broke up the monopoly and dominance of the religious elites. Introducing Urdu as medium of instructions was in fact a strategy of Deoband madrassah to make religious knowledge accessible and intelligible for the general masses. Introduction of Urdu attracted the students a lot towards attaining religious education which seminally played a vital role in popularizing Urdu during colonial era. This approach of adopting Urdu as medium of communication helped spread it in the area other than Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Banaras, where it originated and evolved. Most scholars belonging to the Deoband wrote their most celebrated works in Urdu, i.e. the exegesis of Holy Quran or the book on daily routine matters and mannerism like *Bahishti Zewar* by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1863-1948).<sup>31</sup>

### Academic Administration

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Muhammadan College Fund Committee and Government also made large grants the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College, particularly for the Arabic and science

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<sup>29</sup> Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-e Javed* [Eternity] (Lahore: Zahid Bashir Printer, 2000), 99-103.

<sup>30</sup> Hali, *Hayat-e Javed*, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Ashraf Ali Thanwi, *Bahishti Zewar* (Lahore: Zam Zam Publishers, 1999).

departments,<sup>32</sup> finding loyalist and modernist approaches affective to develop a trust between government and Indian masses. Khan also campaigned to collect funding by the landlord class as well the common villagers under their influence.<sup>33</sup> The education institutions established the founder of Aligarh Movement were thorough based on western style of academia and administrative structures. It is here worth mentioning that the greatest contribution of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is that he cultured these western styled educational trends when those were considered by Indian Muslims as a taboo.

Nonetheless, Darul Ulum Deoband was founded and run by public donations thoroughly. It did not accepted funds from the government, nor did it ask for funds to the Muslim nobility. This enabled Deoband madrassah to work independently and to resist any influence from the influential social segments.

Although the Madrasah disseminated conventional, traditional and orthodox religious education, but there is no denying in that its organization and administration was visionary as well as modern in outlook. Barbara Metcalf in her article, 'The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India' (1978) elaborates that it was indeed a departure from pre-existing traditional education system in India and was strongly based upon 'the English bureaucratic model.'<sup>34</sup> The teachers appointed by madrassah authorities to train the students were highly professionals. The Madrasah acquired separate classroom building, libraries and hostels as soon as it was possible. It was the first time in education history of Indian Muslims that a set curriculum and timeframe for the course was managed to implied for the classes. The performance assessment reports on annual bases was, too, one of the innovative and revolutionary measures in the history of religious educational institutions in South Asian Muslims.

## Conclusion

Summing up the above discussion, it becomes evident that after the socio-political predicaments that the Indian Muslim community faced after the Great Revolt 1857 and British occupation of India, it was the educational institutions which played a vital role as to strengthening and uplifting them. These institutions aimed at renaissance of the Muslims of South Asia adopted different approach to trend the culture of the community those were representing. Aligarh movement came up with modernist and loyalist approach, and popularized scientific technological learning through English medium. It produced seminal effects on culture and politics of Indian Muslims by producing leadership for all-encompassing social and political arena. On the other hand, Darul Ulum Deoband sticking upon the traditional, conventional, and orthodox education and social customs endeavored to defend the religious and cultural integrity of the Muslim community. Yet, it can also be recognized that the response of Deoband movement towards British imperialism and

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<sup>32</sup> Gail Minault and David Lelyveld, "The Campaign for Muslim University 1898-1920," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (March, 1974), pp. 145-189.

<sup>33</sup> Hali, *Hayat-e Javed*, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Metcalf, "Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (1978), 112.



modernization was dynamic. It attempted at resisting imperialism through militancy and revolutionary stances until 1919 when it formed a political party and came into mainstream politics. Moreover, it fashioned academic administration of the madrassah by embracing English bureaucratic model. Deoband movement by evolving a network of sub-organization pertaining to political activities, missionary goals, and ordering of social life of the Muslim community has emerged to be a one of the major sect of Islam in the Muslim World.