

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Muslim Revival:
An Examination of His Religious and Social Reforms

by

Grant Edward Maclure
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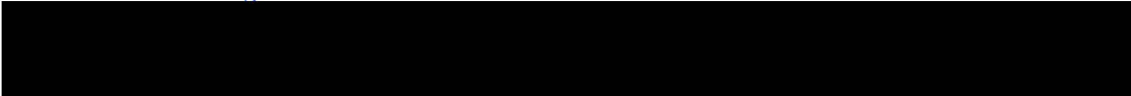
Dr. Harold G. Coward, Supervisor (Department of History)



Dr. Gregory Blue, Departmental Member (Department of History)



Dr. Radhika Desai, Outside Member (Department of Political Science)



Joseph I. Richardson, External Examiner (Department of Religious Studies, Emeritus,
University of British Columbia)

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University of Victoria

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Supervisor: Dr. Harold G. Coward

ABSTRACT

After the Revolt of 1857, Sayyid Ahmad Khan emerged as the first Indian Muslim to react against India's changing cultural and political traditions. He did so by enacting a social reform program which aimed to revitalize the Muslim community through the practice and reflection of faith, using Islam as a touchstone for development, and a commitment to modern education. This thesis will examine the development of Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a theological and social reformer who emphasized education, not separation, as a means to a better India. It examines Sayyid Ahmad Khan's development as a thinker following the events of 1857, and considers the facets or details of his program thereafter. This thesis finds that the nature of his program, and the personal beliefs of its author, preclude the assertion that the Sayyid acted only in the interest of his own religious community.

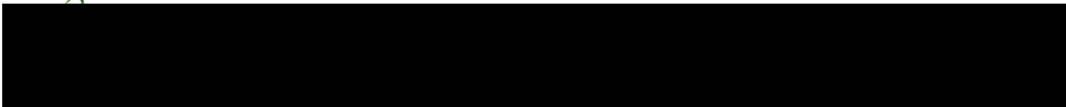
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Independent Fabrications for their technical support and all the good times.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to
Helen P. Maclure,
my mother and friend who made this possible.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his biography on Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Altaf Husain Hali, wondered about the length of his chapter devoted to the "Birth and Family" of his subject. Could forty-two pages be excessive? Hali decided no. Ahmad Khan was a Husaini Sayyid. He could trace his lineage directly back to the Prophet Mohammed, thirty-six generations past. Having left their homes in present-day Arabia and Iraq to escape religious persecution by the Umayyads and Abbasids, the Sayyids settled in many different areas throughout central Asia. Ahmad Khan's family journeyed to Herat, in Afghanistan, but later continued on into the Indian sub-continent sometime during the reign of Shahjahan (1627-1658) to secure employment with the royal family of the Mughal court. Five generations later, on October 17th, 1817, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was born into the fading *sharif* culture of Delhi, splendid and vibrant in its architecture and gardens, ailing and feeble in its leadership and behaviour. He grew up in the home of his maternal grandfather, Khwaja Farid-ud-Din, (1747-1828) an accomplished statesman who had contacts with the British as an ambassador in Tehran, and was the First Minister to the penultimate Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II (1769-1806). Sayyid Ahmad Khan's father, Mir Mutaqqi, was a devout Muslim who chose the life of a recluse but also took time to

introduce his son to the Sufi teachings of Delhi's Shah Ghulam Ali. It was left to his mother, Aziz-al Nisa Begam, to ensure that her son received a proper upbringing. Her unshakable faith was always a source of inspiration for her son. Demonstrating a fondness for writing and poetry, he was carefree in his youth, and he enjoyed the pursuit of sensuous pleasures, very discreetly, until the death of his brother and father. Thereafter, without Mir Mutaqqi's income from the Court, the Sayyid needed to earn a living, and he went against the wishes of his family to work as a *munsif* or junior judge for the British Government.¹ This began his extraordinary career as a self-proclaimed reformer who acted as a liaison between the Raj and Indian Muslims, as well as between Indian Muslims and their future.

Members of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's family were employed as civil and judicial administrators by successive Mughal emperors from Shahjahan to Akbar Shah II (1806-1837). Hafeez Malik tells us that, as upper class Muslims, they were generally detached from the Indian Muslim masses, except in times of crisis when the two groups, the *Sharifs* and *Karkhanadars* respectively, would associate closely.² The *Karkhanadars* were workers of all types: domestic servants, tailors, artisans, masons, bricklayers, Tonga drivers and barbers. They lived in their own neighborhoods throughout Old Delhi, and enjoyed flying kites, town gossip, cockfights and wrestling, which they watched on the banks of the Jamna River. Poor and uneducated, their lives were quickly spent³.

Sharif culture was considered to be more refined and superior. It consisted of the

¹ Altaf Husain Hali, Hayat-I-Javed (New Delhi: Rupa & Co. 1994), p. 1-42.

² Hafeez Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 60.

royalty, the nobility, and the intellectual elites. Mughal Royalty was headed by the Emperor who resided within the high sandstone walls of the Red Fort. Emperors enjoyed every conceivable, and not so conceivable, comfort. However, their brothers and uncles were kept in confinement, isolated from the court and power. Despite the Red Fort's immensity, roughly one thousand yards long by five hundred yards wide, it was overcrowded by its residents, who were called *Salatins*. They were the Kings sons and daughters and descendants of former kings and princes who insisted on the privilege to live within the fort. Only forty-five out of one hundred and thirty living sons and grandsons of former emperors lived outside the Red Fort in 1856.⁴ As a class, the *Salatins* enjoyed more prestige than power for they were not permitted to make decisions. By 1803, when Delhi was captured by the British, the *Salatins*, like Emperor Shah Alam II (1759-1806), lost their ability to administer their lands.

The nobility of *Sharif* society was collectively known as the *Umara*. They were military commanders, and civil and judicial administrators, who received salaries and temporary estates for their services. The *Umara* lived in the houses between the Red Fort and the *Jamia Masjid*, a world described as "secure, although intellectually sterile."

Malik explains,

As a class they had failed to cope with the new political and cultural challenges, and certainly had no appreciation of the dynamic qualities of the Western culture which basically threatened their own central Asian culture.⁵

During the Rebellion of 1857, when Indians of all persuasions demonstrated their

³ *ibid*, p. 27.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 32.

displeasure with the British regime, some *Umara* supported Bahadur Shah II (1837-1858), the final Mughal Emperor of Dehli. As a result many were killed in retribution by soldiers of the British East India Company, who destroyed the *Umara's* houses in an area now called the *maydan*, or plain. Few survived the ordeal.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's family belonged to the *Umara*. Khwaja Farid-ud-Din is said to have epitomized the "pragmatic and manipulative tradition, which was produced by a class of professional administrators who lent their talents to the powers that be and attached no allegiance to a particular sovereign."⁶ He is also said to have had a powerful impact on Sayyid Ahmad, who cherished the painting he had of his grandfather standing with Akbar Shah and General David Ochterlony (1758-1825) in the Red Fort's *Diwan-i'Aam* (audience hall). It was through Farid-ud-Din that Sayyid Ahmad Khan learned the extent and power of British sovereignty. Farid-ud-Din also introduced western ideas to the family, but they preserved their traditional values .

Mir Muttaqi proved to be the antithesis of Farid-ud-Din. He rejected the idea of a career in government service to pursue the spiritual and intellectual traditions of Shah Ghulam Ali. They emphasized love of mankind and "annihilation in God". But these aspirations often degenerated into self-denial and escape from responsibility.⁷ While Mir Mutaqqi spent much of his time reflecting on faith, Aziz-al Nisa Begum seemed to take hers for granted. She took care of several destitute women in her own house, and regularly saved five percent of the family income, instead of the two and one-half percent

⁵ *ibid*, p. 38.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 60.

enjoined by Islamic law, for *Zaka* (legal charity). With this money she gave out allowances to poor women and those who could not afford to marry. Nisa Begam was Ahmad Khan's first teacher and stressed the virtues of forgiveness, tolerance, and respect for the elderly. She ensured that Sayyid Ahmad received a traditional education, beginning with recitation of the *Qur'an* at age five. He studied Arabic grammar and syntax, logic, algebra and geometry. The Sayyid also studied medicine under Hakiym Ghulam Haiydar Khan, and then practiced at his clinic for several months. But when Sayyid Ahmad reached eighteen he stopped pursuing a formal education.⁸ He learned the routine of judicial proceedings from his uncle, Khalil Allah Khan, a *Sadar Amin* in Delhi, and went to Agra in 1839 as a *Naib Munsif* or deputy reader. In 1843 he wrote *Jala'al-Qulub bi-dhiker al-Mahbub*, a biography of the Prophet Mohammed, and in 1844 he published *Tashil fi Jarr al-Thaqil*, a book on Persian mechanics. From 1846 to 1854 he resided in Delhi as a *Munsif* until he was transferred to Bijnor in 1855. He would remain there until after the Rebellion of 1857, an event which left the Khan family as victims, without a home, and the Sayyid with enough remorse to turn his hair prematurely grey.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan will always be regarded as a very controversial figure in Indian and even Pakistani history. If we can encapsulate his thoughts and methods in a few brief sentences, one can say that the Sayyid believed the British Raj to be a permanent and progressive force in India, their rule not without flaw but in its essence benevolent and constructive. The same can be said or extended to cover his attitude toward the modern developments in science and learning that seemed to be part and

⁷ *ibid*, p. 60.

parcel of their governance. That Muslims had previously reacted to the Raj as something unworthy, evil or anti-Islamic, could be attributed, in his view, to their recent fall from power, their ignorance and superstition, and a static or irrational view of Islam which left too much room for so called *jihads* and not enough for the *ijtihad* (individual reasoning) that was required for the day. The remedy, according to Khan, was to encourage Muslim loyalty towards the British regime, to “Educate, educate, educate”⁹, and to reform Islam stressing its compatibility with reason and science. The controversy about Sayyid Ahmad Khan arises over the interpretation of this remedy and its focus on Indian Muslims instead of on Indians in general. It brings into question Indian identity to ask, is it possible at the same time to belong to both the polity of India and to the universal brotherhood of Islam? It is a significant question in light of twentieth century developments in Indian colonial politics, which found Indian Muslims forging their own course of political action against Indian Nationalists. This culminated in the creation of Pakistan and a divided India.

Despite significant similarities in their desire for and ideas about societal reforms, it has never been suggested that Sayyid Ahmad Khan share Raja Rammohan Roy's(1772-1833) title as “Father” of modern India. Certainly, the moniker is erroneous at best in either case, and I think that neither of them would have been enthusiastic about accepting that responsibility. Still, as Christian Troll has indicated, both men were in favour of cooperation with the Raj and both regarded the Christian Bible as a work of God; both

⁸ *ibid*, p. 70-71.

⁹ Madhui Yasin, "Ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: An Evaluation in Historical Perspective" Studies in Islam, 19(1982), p. 151-165, pp. 155.

demanded that rationality be used in the study and application of religion, and both made use of the printing press as a medium of communication.¹⁰ For their respective efforts to free Hindus and Muslims from -the effects of superstition both have been celebrated and chastised by their co-religionists, yet only for Sayyid Ahmad Khan has this been at the expense of being labeled and treated primarily as a separatist. The summation of the Sayyid by the Indian historian Sachchidananda Bhattacharya is commonplace.

Sir Sayyid...was first a Muhammadan, and then only an Indian. He thought the Muslims of India were a people separate from the Hindus and must not be absorbed by them or united with them. In fact, though [he] did much to improve the condition of Muhammadans in India, he did very little for India as a whole.¹¹

To understand this, one needs to consider the Sayyid's family background. The Sayyid and his family were well connected with the Mughal court and thoroughly conversant with Mughal political practices. These practices "presupposed that the basis of strong and secure government rested upon the rulers ability to establish ritual ties of loyalty... with strategically significant lineage groups."¹² Men of influence and wealth provided the opportunity for a responsive government "precisely because of its legitimization by members of the ruling classes."¹³ As David Lelyveld has suggested, as far as politics was concerned, Sayyid Ahmad Khan "regarded the new situation as no

¹⁰ Christian Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan: Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology (New Dehli: Vikas, 1978), p.18.

¹¹ S. Bhattacharya, A Dictionary of Indian History (NewYork: George Braziller, 1982), p. 758.

¹² Farzana Shaikh, Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947. (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), p. 94.

¹³ *ibid*, p. 95.

more than a change of hands; 'the sultanate now belonged to Queen Victoria'. The criteria that had once defined good government under the Mughals continued to be just as relevant."¹⁴ The Sayyid and his principal supporters, the *ashraf* or urban and educated Muslims, were profoundly concerned with the survival of the Muslim community which they saw as an "embattled minority" whose participation in the Mutiny was greatly exaggerated by the British. After 1858 when London considered applying some features of Western democratic representation to India, Muslims found themselves asking whether or not Western models of representation would contradict their traditional assumptions about allegiance. It was a time of great introspection. To secure a brighter future, which required employment and patronage by the Government, a policy of loyalty and cooperation with the British regime seemed to be the most expedient. For some urban and educated Muslims, issues related to politics, land holding and professional employment were of the utmost importance. For Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and those engaged in religious and educational reform, the priority was to cultivate beneficial moral qualities in individual believers "in the hope that therein lay the way to communal advancement."¹⁵ When this policy was threatened by the calls for a democratic political process, initiated by the Indian National Congress Party during the 1880's, the Sayyid denounced the party and asked his fellow Muslims, and Hindus too incidentally, to reject it.

From this, some historians have made the claim that Sayyid Ahmad argued for the

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 94.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 81.

political separation of Muslims from other Indians and, hence, for the claim of a separate identity requiring a separate state. The work of Shan Muhammed is interesting in that it affirms the role of the Sayyid as an Indian nationalist but its emphasis on identifying him as an essentially secular thinker becomes problematic in light of the numerous writings Sayyid Ahmad left on religion - not just Islam, but also Christianity. Shan Mohammed also appears to disregard the evident influence that the *Qur'an* and the examples of the Prophet Mohammed had on his thoughts about ethics. That some of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's ideas were indeed secular in application will be considered in the following chapter, but it is difficult not to appreciate too that he was a very religious man. Before all else, he was a believer. The author of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan , Hafeez Malik, would agree up to a point, but would emphasize that Muslims who had never been "Indianized" were "purer", and that Muslims "were a distinct and separate cultural and political entity."¹⁶ From this view the Sayyid emerges as the stoker of the fire of a modernization revolution,¹⁷ which culminated in the Aligarh movement and in Muslim nationalism which Malik claims, Sayyid Ahmad regarded as instinctual. Malik has emphasized the importance of the Sayyid as a liberal modernizer of Islam but has also disregarded elements in his thought stressing the necessity of diversity and harmony. So, with instinct instead of reason, we find the Sayyid in support of those, like Malik and Saleem M.M. Qureshi, who deny the positive aspects of cultural synthesis, and the ability of Hindus and Muslims to form a

¹⁶ Hafeez Malik, Moslem Nationalism in India and Pakistan (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1963), p. 12.

¹⁷ Hafeez Malik, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan (New York:

peaceful and dignified union.¹⁸ Like other Muslim and Hindu intellectuals of nineteenth-century India, such as Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), Syed Jamal-ud-Din Afghani (1839-1897) or Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Sayyid Ahmad Khan developed a coherent vision of the socio-religious condition of the country, against the backdrop of British Colonialism and the cultural superiority it maintained. K.N. Panikkar suggests that reformers who wish to strengthen indigenous culture and institutions, did so as a reaction to colonial culture and ideology, not to antagonisms between communities.¹⁹

Amongst the latest of those to write about the Sayyid, Rajmohan Gandhi notes that the Sayyid did not only ask Muslims to maintain their distance from Congress, but also asked the same of Hindus, mounting “a Hindustani, not a Muslim, campaign against Congress”.²⁰ This helps to clarify the confusion over the Sayyid’s use of the word *qaum* meaning people, tribe or community, which he employed interchangeably to refer to both Muslims alone or to Hindus and Muslims together. In Gurdaspur on January 27, 1884, the Sayyid said

You might have seen and heard in the old history books and we see it today also, that the word nation (Qaum) applied to the people who live in the same country. All the people living in Afghanistan are called one nation. The diverse people of Iran are called Iranis. Europeans hold different religious beliefs and ideas but they are considered as one nation. In short, from times immemorial the word nation is

Columbia, 1980), p. X.

¹⁸ See Saleem M. M., Qureshi, Jinnah and the Making of a Nation (Karachi: Council for Pakistan Studies, 1969), p. 13-14.

¹⁹ S. Bhattacharya and R. Thapar, eds., Situating Indian History for Sarvepalli Gopal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986). p. 432.

²⁰ Rajmohan Gandhi, Eight Lives- A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter (Syracuse: State Press, 1986), p. 38.

used for the inhabitants of a country though they may have their separate characteristics. Oh Hindus and Mussalmans, do you inhabit any country other than India? Do you not both live here on the same land and are you not buried in this land or cremated on the ghats of this land? You live and die here. Therefore remember that Hindu and Mussalman are words of religious significance [,] otherwise Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians who live in this one country constitute one nation (Cheers). When all these groups are called one nation, they should be one in the service of the country, which is the country of all.²¹

Gandhi's work is too confined in its brevity to offer much elaboration on the Sayyid as a religious thinker, but Christian Troll and Shelia M^cDonough have also made substantial contributions in this area, suggesting that Sayyid Ahmad was principally interested in theology and ethics rather than to political development. It also seems to me that his beliefs and teachings might have universal applications which could make a significant impact on how one interprets Islam, how we view Indian history, and how we might learn to accommodate and preserve diversity. By examining the religious and ethical aspects of his writings and their applications in his career, we might be able to encourage the view that it is not the practice of faith or the claim of its truth and vitality that is important, but its application in society.

This thesis will examine the development of Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a theological and social reformer who emphasized education, as a means to a better India. Chapter II will treat the historical context in which the Sayyid reacted to the Mutiny of 1857, and will discuss his role in its events, paying special attention to his personal account of those

²¹ Shan Mohammed, Writings and Speeches of Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1972), p. 265-266.

days. Chapter III will be concerned with the methods and details of his reform program including both his religious/ethical and his educational platforms.

CHAPTER II

SAYYID AHMAD KHAN AND THE MUTINY OF 1857

For centuries, with the spread of Islam beyond Arabia and into Europe, Africa, and Asia, Muslims have typically held two complementary identities. Eqbal Ahmed has referred to them as being “particularist” and “universalist” loyalties;

one - immediate, social and spatially particular; the other - historical, ideological, cultural and global...The interests and demands of local authority -- that is, the extended family, tribe, city, guild, and ethnic or linguistic groups -- in principle competed with the universal expectations of the *umma* the vast Islamicate, that is, the worldwide community of people who embrace the teachings of the *Qur'an* and practice Islam.²²

Since the quality of Muslim life necessarily depended upon a balance between the two, Islamic politics concentrated on processes that might help to achieve such a balance -- “a certain decentralization of power, a toleration of differences, and a pluralism in religion and cultural life.”²³ Common identity in the face of diversity was encouraged by shared systems of law, religious fraternities, education and aesthetics. Thus, the *umma* (the worldwide Islamic community) could achieve a form of unity by common adherence to

²² Ashgar Khan, ed., Islam, Politics and the State - The Pakistan Experience (London: Zed Books, 1985), p. 23.

the *Shar'ia* (socio-religious law of Islam) which was based on the *Qur'an* and to the *Sunna* (practices and precepts of the Prophet Mohammed) which was supported by the *ijmah* (consensus, popular opinion) of the community.

Certainly, regional variations and sectarian differences precluded homogeneity of Muslim thought and practice throughout the *umma* but this was to be expected. The *Qur'an* had revealed that variation was one of the signs of Allah , and therefore an integral part of existence.

“And among His Signs
Is the creation of the heavens
And the earth, and the variations
In your languages
And your colours: verily
In that are the signs
For those who know”²⁴

What remained important was the spirit of solidarity within the Islamic community, the spirit of brotherhood, so often associated with Islam, that made it “not uncommon for jurists and scholars to serve in more than one country in a lifetime, for artists and architects to live and work in various kingdoms, for elites to intermarry across political boundaries, for nomadic tribes to move from one ruler's domain to another.”²⁵

However, by the 18th century this state of affairs was disrupted, as Western imperialism began to infringe on Islamic societies and impose territorial boundaries

²³ *ibid*, p. 23.

²⁴ The Holy Qur'an, English Translations of the Meanings and Commentary. Surat Ar-rum, 30:22 King Fahd Complex, Al-Madinah, 1989, p. 1182.

²⁵ Khan, Islam, Politics and the State, p. 24.

where none had existed before. Colonization by the British, French, Russian and Dutch brought Muslims into new spheres of influence in which they were confronted by alien systems of rule, jurisprudence, morality and religion. Variation would take on new meanings and dimensions for the *umma*, as it tried to come to terms with a modernity that seemed overwhelmingly hostile to both “particularist” and “universalist” identities, and variation would seem to be an appropriate word to describe the responses of Muslims from different countries to the demands made upon them by foreign regimes and to the ideological challenges those demands entailed.

In Mughal India, the range of responses extended from the extreme of declaring India *dar al-harb*, a land of war, to that of calling it *dar al-Islam*, a land of peace.

Within the annals of pre-colonial history, the Mughal Empire remains impressive as one of the greatest centralized and cosmopolitan states ever known. By the 17th century, from the capital of Delhi, the Emperor held political authority over an estimated 150 million people, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Christian, spread out over 3.2 million square kilometers.²⁶ By 1720, India had become a popular destination for hundreds of Europeans. Western adventurers, traders, seamen and diplomats lived in every major town throughout the land, usually with little interference from local rulers. Unlike China or Tokugawa Japan, during the same period, Europeans were allowed to travel freely in Mughal India because society and state were basically indifferent to their presence. As long as visitors paid the applicable taxes or customs duties they could stay as long as they wished and go wherever they pleased. On occasion certain foreigners of “higher

²⁶ John F. Richards, The New Cambridge History of India: The Mughal Empire (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), p. 1.

status or ability” would be depicted mingling with court officials in the splendid Mughal paintings of the period. But, as the standards of the genre demanded, they were usually represented in a miniature form, to mirror their status and influence. As John Richards has noted, “The Mughal emperors, measuring their success by wealth, victory, and grandeur, saw little to interest them in the politics and culture of Europe.”²⁷

However this attitude of basic indifference would soon become highly problematic. In fact, it seems to have been a symptom of the complacency and inertia that characterized the final years of Mughal authority. After the death of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), the dynasty which had begun under the sword of the Lodhi Afghan, Babur (1483-1530), quickly began to disintegrate, a victim of petty succession squabbles, political fragmentation, central Asian challenges and the rise of various indigenous rivals, particularly the Hindu Marathas and Jats. In the years from 1707 until 1750, war was the chosen method of diplomacy, and in the power vacuum created after 1750 the British East India Company began its dramatic territorial expansion on the sub-continent by assuming control over Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.

With the rule over new lands came new functions of governance for the Company, namely the collection of revenue and the administration of justice. Initially, the law was left to itself, as Europeans, Muslims and Hindus all were governed according to their own traditions of jurisprudence. However under the viceroyship of Warren Hastings, a Supreme Court of Judicature was implemented via Royal Charter. Its jurisdiction included British citizens, Company employees, and “Indian residents of the provinces of

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 290.

Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in case of a dispute with a British citizen.”²⁸ This arrangement seems to have created areas of overlapping jurisdiction, and in 1790 a frustrated Governor General Cornwallis lamented the situation and stated that the Indian judicial system was “entirely useless, futile and rotten to the core.” He especially blamed the “gross defects of the Muhammedan law of crimes, and defects in the constitution of the courts.”²⁹ As a result Muslim and Hindu law became codified and was mixed with British Law under the so-called Cornwallis Code of 1793.

The resulting “Anglo-Muhammedan” law left ultimate power in the hands of the Governor General and his Council through the supreme court established for Indians. Foreign to Muslim thought and derived from sources other than the Shar'ia, and thus irreligious in the eyes of Muslims, the reforms placed weight on circumstantial evidence. Capital crimes became a public problem rather than a private injury or a social crime; hard labour replaced capital punishment, and *diya* (blood money) was forbidden.³⁰ These changes were as repugnant to Muslims as certain aspects of the *Shari'ah* were to Britons, and Muslims demonstrated their frustration by distancing themselves both from the British regime and from English as the new language of government. More than just an exercise in smug indignation, this reaction reflected the severity of the change, with grave future implications for society. The influential theologian Shah' Abd al'Aziz (1746-1824 thus) denounced the new law as heresy and spoke of India as again *dar al-harb*.

Islamic law does not prevail at all; and the law of the

²⁸ Aziz Ahmad, Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964 (London: Oxford, 1967), p. 15.

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 15.

³⁰ Ahmad, Islamic Modernism, p. 17-18.

Christian over-lords is current without check or hindrance in the sense that in administrative and civil cases, in the prescription of punishments, the non-Muslims are in complete authority...their chief principle is profit and sovereign control...from [Delhi] to Calcutta Christian rule prevails.³¹

The hostility of Muslims to the new regime triggered a series of so-called *jihads* (holy war) in the North West and Bengal as well as a variety of reform movements which often turned out to be as anti-Hindu and anti-Sikh as they were anti-British.³² Yet in the eyes of many well-to-do Muslims, “the reform movements, with their attacks on landlords and their disrespect for family and position, could be perceived as anti-Muslim themselves.”³³ In Hardy's judgment such militancy “was to have profound long term effects on British political strategy in India. It helped to reinforce the British belief after [the rebellion of] 1857 that Muslims were by nature fanatical and irreconcilable and could only be kept quiet by a judicious mixture of buffets and boons... .”³⁴ As Hardy has pointed out, to most British observers practically all Muslims were rebels with grandiose ideas about how to run the country. Professor Thomas Metcalf has observed in discussing the uprising of 1857, “In the British view it was Muslim intrigue and Muslim leadership that converted a *sepoys* mutiny into a political conspiracy, aimed at the extinction of the British Raj.”³⁵ For example the author of The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall, and Life of

³¹ *ibid*, p. 19.

³² Khan, Islam, p. 72.

³³ P. Hardy, The Muslims of British India (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), p. 60.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 60.

Mohammed, Sir William Muir, wrote "That the proclamation of the King of Delhi's reign should unsettle the allegiance of the Moslems was to be expected from the singularly close combination of the political and religious elements in the system of Islam."³⁶

Sayyid Ahmad Khan however argued that Sir William was incorrect in his observations. In his eyes the possibility of an organized conspiracy, with any real leadership, was precluded by the sporadic nature of the event itself, and by the senseless behavior demonstrated by the *sepoys* and the mutineers in general. Furthermore, without denying the "close combination of the political and religious" in Islam, Sayyid Ahmad Khan maintained that Muir and the British administration had as much misunderstood the linkage as did those Muslims who found rebellion, hostility and suspicion of all things Western to be the most adequate response to the situation.

The Rebellion was certainly not only a Muslim affair, as Hindus participated equally in its undertaking. But, in its reaction to the uprising, the Raj was determined to ensure that the Muslims would never rise again. The British believed that Muslims were the chief instigators behind the Rebellion based on their recent fall from power. Mughal Delhi was destroyed, its mosques desecrated, and members of the Royal family were exiled or executed. "Men and women were shot dead or hanged from the branches of the trees and their corpses were left rotting...The houses were plundered and the wretched inhabitants were driven out and the city was a perfect picture of desolation, completely abandoned..."³⁷

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 62.

³⁶ Thomas R. Metcalf, The Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857-1870 (Princeton: U.P. 1965), p. 298.

³⁷ Shan Muhammed, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan-A Political Biography (Meerut: Prakash 1969), p. 28.

The trauma was one which remained with India throughout the following decades. If there is one aspect of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's career that most historians agree upon it is the devastating effect which the Rebellion of 1857 had both on the man and on his surroundings. In fact, his work is often divided into pre-and post-rebellion periods because of the zeal that distinguished his activity in the latter from that in the former. Rajmohan Gandhi has called this a "classic transformation":

Until [the Rebellion] Sayyid Ahmad was the center of his life. He focused on Sayyid Ahmad's pleasures and successes, Sayyid Ahmad's guilts and sorrows. With [the Rebellion] the center changed; he started to focus on the community's condition.³⁸

Abd al-Haqq, one of the period's finest writers who is often considered the "father" of Urdu, perceived the change in Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a somewhat romantic awakening, akin to a form of release.

Farhad did not love Shirin and Nal did not love Damayanti as much as Sayyid Ahmad loved his qaum. Sleeping or walking, standing or sitting, this and this alone was his devotional exercise. He reached the mystical stage of annihilation in the qaum.³⁹

Yet, both Gandhi and Abd al-Haqq are only partially correct in emphasizing some sort of change or accelerated devotion because there is ample evidence to suggest that Sayyid Ahmad was already involved in Muslim polemics previous to the troubles of 1857. During the 1840's and even the late 1830's, Sayyid Ahmad had frequently written on India's societal decay and the need for reform in his brother's newspaper, the *Saiyid al*

³⁸ Rajmohan Gandhi, Eight Lives-A Study Of The Hindu-Muslim Encounter (Albany: State Press, 1986), p. 24.

Akhbar. The focus of these early writings was on the purification of religious practice and the reform of Islam. Likewise, in his *Athar al Sanadid*, an archeological survey of Delhi published in 1847, chapters were included on the birth of Urdu in India, the role of the traditional Muslim aristocracy in Delhi, and revolutionary community leaders such as Ismail Shahid and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, both of whom Sayyid Ahmad had known as a youth.⁴⁰ That these works were societal in nature and intended to have immediate practical consequences becomes clear according to Troll when one considers that neither

... the rationalistic outlook of 19th century scholarship in Europe nor the religious estrangement of a class of young, western-educated Muslims had appeared and it is these phenomena that are held to have "compelled" him into theology. The early writings prove in fact that Sayyid Ahmad Khan was then already aware of the Islamic dimensions of his community's contemporary situation, and that he responded to it in specifically religious terms.⁴¹

Troll's point applies equally to the motives for his behavior and actions during and after the Rebellion, when he was involved in the protection of British citizens and accepted the British state, stressing the absolute necessity to educate the rulers and the ruled as to each others' needs, and the rejection of violence as a means to solve political problems. Considering the events of 1857, the Sayyid believed that in the uprising Muslim decadence had reached "its lowest ebb" and that regeneration was nearly an impossibility.

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Hafeez Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan And Muslim Modernization In India And Pakistan (New York: Columbia, 1980), p. 75.

⁴¹ C.W. Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan-A Reinterpretation Of Muslim Theology (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), p. xviii.

British authority was legitimate, legal, and a vast improvement over that which had been offered by Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh rulers of the not so distant past.⁴² To the Sayyid the uprising was not a rebellion but only a mutiny, and the mutineers had neither a case nor a cause to justify their actions against the Raj, especially in light of the tremendous loss of lives, European and Indian alike. In his view ignorance and selfishness were the primary roots of this evil, and the resulting defeat was therefore divinely sanctioned. As he wrote,

God has punished you Hindustanis for this ungratefulness and allowed you to experience again a sample of the Government of former times, after he suspended English rule for a short time. Oh Inhabitants of District Bijnor! Think of the ...events which happened to you, how with just a short suspension of authority, nobody's rule possessed any real power and force. How unjust and barbarous people were to their fellow men in those days, with thousands of homes looted, scores of villages raged by fire, hundreds killed, and thousands robbed and impoverished.⁴³

It should be stressed that this reproach was not specific to Muslims but was addressed to Hindustanis in general. This reflected the Sayyid's efforts to be objective in his record and assessment of the events of 1857, from which he drew conclusions that would influence not only the future course of Muslim/Raj relations but that of Hindu/Muslim relations as well.

During January of 1855, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was transferred from Delhi to the district of Bijnor to accept a posting as Sadr Amin. Bijnor was located at the northwest corner of Bareilly or Rohilkhand, and was framed by the Ganges to the west, the Phika river to the east, the Garhwal hills to the north, and Moradabad to the south. Covering

⁴² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Modern Islam in India, a Social Analysis. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), p. 16.

nearly 1800 square miles, and home to 467,494 Hindus and 230,727 Muslims, the area was considerably urbanized, with nearly 2000 villages of 1000 people or more. Up until 1857, when rebels assumed temporary control, this area had been under the authority of the British East India Company, which had received title from the Nawab of Awadh in 1801. Dabbling in money-lending and agriculture, the largest property owners were Hindu Rajputs, Gujars, Brahmans and Banias. Estate owners among the Muslims were Pathans, Shaikhs, and Sayyids, but the majority of the people belonged primarily to the working classes who spoke the common language of Urdu.⁴⁴ The Pathans, in particular, remained resentful over the Company's acquisition of the territory, a situation which had been duly noted by the Anglican Bishop Heber in the mid 1820's. He had observed that "the people appear by no means to have forgotten or forgiven their first injuries. The Mussulman chiefs, who are numerous, are very angry at being without employment under Government or hope of rising in the State or army and are continually breaking out into acts of insubordination and violence."⁴⁵ The Bishop's observations seem to have maintained their relevance for decades as serious disturbances erupted in Bijnor in 1837 and 1842. In fact, within three short weeks of the revolt in 1857, "every regiment in the Rohilkhand Division had rebelled, many Europeans had then been murdered, and Khan Bahadur Khan, a descendant of the national hero of the Rohillas [Nawab Najib-Ud-Daulah], had proclaimed himself Nawab or Viceroy in Bareilly of the Mughal King of

⁴³ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History Of The Bijnor Rebellion (East Lansing: Michigan State Press), p. 107.

⁴⁴ Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. 104-105.

⁴⁵ Reginald Heber, A Narrative of a Journey Through The Upper Provinces of India From Calcutta to Bombay 1824-1825 (London, 1844), p. 236.

Delhi"⁴⁶ Hindu Rajputs meanwhile fought the Pathans and waited for the British army to re-take the district.

Of these events, in which he had participated, the Sayyid recorded the details for May 1857 to April 1858 in his *Tarikh Sarkashiy-i Dhillā Bijnor* (History of the Revolt in the District of Bijnor) and his *Asab-i Baghawat-i Hind* (The Causes for India's Revolt) both published in 1858. His *Prayer for Peace at Moradabad* and a letter to Sir John Kaye, the Secretary to the Duke of Argyll, in 1869, are also pertinent to establishing his views in this era, they remain of vital importance to understanding the complexity of the uprising because, to the best of our knowledge, they are the only analyses of the Rebellion written by an Indian who actually took part therein.⁴⁷

The History of the Revolt in the District of Bijnor was an attempt to deal with what Sayyid Ahmad Khan saw as the primary issues surrounding the event including his own loyalty to the Raj, the defiance of Khan Bahdur Khan (also known as Nawab Mahmud Khan or Na Mahmud, the unblessed one, as the Sayyid used to call him), degenerating Hindi-Muslim relations, and the final triumph of the British in quelling the disturbances. As Sayyid Ahmad Khan recounted the events, Na Mahmud "the unblessed", took control of Bijnor on the 20th of May 1857, with approximately seventy Pathan soldiers and several empty wagons which were to be used to transfer the spoils of war to Najibabad. Anxious to protect both property and citizenry, the Sayyid had thrown the "official monies" down a well and then urged Na Mahmud to proclaim his rule in the

⁴⁶ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *History*, p. vii.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. ii.

name of the Government and to guarantee the safety of all British administrators and their families. "Our biggest worry was for the English officers and their wives since these miserable, disloyal soldiers were most of all determined to harm [them]."⁴⁸ The "our" referred to the Sayyid's fellow Muslim and Hindu colleagues who had become friends with their employers, particularly with the Joint Magistrate Mr. George Palmer, and Mr. Alexander Shakespeare the Collector and District Magistrate.

Na Mahmud accepted the advice of the Sayyid who had Shakespeare authorize a letter of investiture written by the Sayyid which transferred power officially to Na Mahmud stating that

Depending upon the discretion of the Government, the administration of the District is transferred to you. You are required to administer the District efficiently, and to protect the property and other possessions of the Collector, and the Magistrate of the District.⁴⁹

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan it was his intention and that of his friends to cooperate with Mahmud Khan, but only to a limited extent, while they worked on a plan to render him powerless. With the help of Pandit Radhakishan (Deputy Inspector of Schools) and the Tahsildar, Sayyid Turab Ali, a committee of consultation/frustration was established to prevent individuals from aiding Mahmud Khan without approval of the committee. In terms of revenue, which as what Mahmud Khan desired the most, only enough to pay government employee's salaries was collected, while tenant farmers were urged not to pay their taxes directly to Mahmud Khan but only to the Tahsildar Bakshi

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan , p. 106.

Ram. The delays certainly bothered the Nawab as did Sayyid Ahmad Khan's persistence in applying English law in his subjudice proceedings to remind the people "that English control remains as before."⁵⁰

The British citizens were allowed to leave the district; and Mahmud Khan, despite the acceptance of Shakespeare's letter, but supported by Muslims and Hindus who recognized the Nawab's right to rule as hereditary, declared " The People Belong to God; the country belongs to the King; and authority belongs to Nawab Mahmud Khan."⁵¹ This the Sayyid claimed to have accepted as a natural outcome, though he thought it surprising due to the two to one population ratio the Hindus had over the Muslims. However, not all Hindus were happy with the situation, especially the landlords who either questioned the abilities of Mahmud Khan and therefore held back their taxes, or remained loyal to the British.⁵²

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the priority of Mahmud Khan was to establish his regime; and, although he recognized Sayyid Ahmad Khan's pro-British sentiments, Mahmud Khan was also aware of the Sayyid's administrative capabilities and tried to lure the Sayyid into his fold with promises of an estate and title. The Sayyid reports his response as follows

By God! Nawab Sahib, I speak in your best interest!
Remove this thought from your mind. The authority of the
English offices will never go. Imagine, if you will, what
would happen if the English left all of Hindustan. Except
for the English authorities, no one else can rule in

⁵⁰ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History , p. 28.

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 25.

⁵² Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. 107-108.

Hindustan. Don't renounce your allegiance to them, I said. If the British should indeed leave, as you think, you would still remain a Nawab ... If you want me to share in your administration, ask permission of the Collector [Shakespeare] and promise at the same time that you will do nothing without first obtaining his approval ... However, his basic inclination was evil, and he became angry at my words and dismissed me with a frown.⁵³

Mahmud Khan began then to inaugurate his own administration. He assembled from office holders of his own family who were eager to resume their old posts, and he increased the number of soldiers in his service. He began harassing those who resisted him or those perceived as being vulnerable, especially Chaudhri Umrao Singh, the "golden bird" "rated in the district as being very rich but also its weakest personage."⁵⁴ Other Hindu landlords retaliated and this escalated into general Hindu-Muslim conflicts. On August 6th of 1857 Mahmud Khan was defeated, the Muhammadi Jhandu (Muslim flag) was lowered, and the Hindus had their rule proclaimed in the name of the Raj, while Bijnor was looted and burned.⁵⁵

The Sayyid maintains that prior to these events, disputes and animosities were non-existent between the Hindus and Muslims of Bijnor, at least in recent memory. "On the contrary, Muslim servants prevailed in numbers in the house of the Chaudhris. Hindus were employed in the same way, as soldiers etc. at the Nawab's palace."⁵⁶ According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan that this was generally the case throughout Mughal

⁵³ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History of p. 29.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 34.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 47-50.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 40.

India since the time of Akbar the Great, who encouraged cultural synthesis by including Hindus in his government with significant portfolios.⁵⁷ But that was the distant past. In Bijnor the Sayyid was witnessing events that he said would lead

... to an increase in religious hatred ... the Hindu temples in Sherkat were damaged by Muslims, while in Chittawar and Sowaheri, Hindus damaged the mosques ... Hindus singled out Muslims for killing or Hindus were singled out for killing by Muslims ... This hatred grew so intense that it proved impossible to rescue Hindus whenever the Muslims had the upper hand, or to rescue Muslims whenever the Hindus had the upper hand.⁵⁸

In the conclusion of *Tarkh Sarkashiy-i Dhillia Bijnor* the Sayyid laments that the natives of Hindustan had not learned anything from their past, neither "from the facts of history, nor from reading books," and in their ignorance they invited the worst of the past to repeat itself and reacquaint them with the injustice and oppression that used to take place in the days of past rulers. "If [they] had been acquainted with the injustice and excesses of those past days [they] would have appreciated the value of English rule and given thanks to God."⁵⁹ In Sayyid Ahmad Khan's view, they were not grateful and their punishment was sent from above.

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan both Muslims and Hindus suffered greatly and equally under each other's tyranny at this time. He asked his co-religionists to "ponder the question of why those Nawabs did not harm them," and then answered that "this was only a matter of political expediency, for the wretches were only interested in keeping the

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 39-40.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 40.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 107.

Muslims on their side"⁶⁰ until the Mutiny had stabilized. If Muslims and Hindus were unable to forge an alliance during a time of crisis, by falling prey to economic and political concerns, then what would become of them during times of peace?

Believing that so-called religious conflicts were often encouraged by the temporal needs of elites, but that people in general desired peace, and were thus not opposed to British rule, the Sayyid extolled the benefits of rule by the Raj as a way to balance power between Hindus and Muslims. What the English offered, according to the Sayyid, was "an atmosphere of live and let live. The Hindu builds temples in which to worship; the Muslim builds mosques where prayers are read and the call to prayer is uttered. There is no one to stop and not one to forbid. The merchant pursues his trading affairs ...and there is no fear of dacoit or thug."⁶¹ Their rule was destined by "The Almighty's wisdom" which was offered so that Indians might "assay the worth of English government and appreciate that the shade of its protection ... is really better than the shadow of the phoenix [the symbol of the Mughal rule]."⁶²

If this were so, if the rule of India's new Christian rulers was so impartial, benevolent, and necessary, then why in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's opinion had there been a mutiny at all? The belief that it was a sign of discontent from above was a prima-facie explanation to the Sayyid, but there were also important grievances of a temporal nature which presented them in his *Asab-i Baghawat-i Hind* (The Causes for India's Revolt).

Written in Urdu and privately printed in 1858, *Asab-i Baghawat-i Hind*

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 107.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 108.

endeavoured to enlighten the British Government in regards to its own errors in governing the people of India. This work boldly suggested where and how the British bureaucrats might want to direct change to avoid future misunderstandings. Before one could explain the causes of the Rebellion, he argued one must decide exactly who or what a rebel was. This issue had been debated by British military and civil officials in February of 1858,⁶³ and as mentioned earlier, in the eyes of many British soldiers and their commanders, all Indians were rebels. Many had therefore been subjected to summary execution. The Sayyid was well aware of this, but he put forth the view that only those who persisted in anti-government activities and continued to resist the returning English armies were rebels. This view became the official British policy in Bijnor and prevented a further loss of lives there.

In defining what constituted a rebellion the Sayyid suggested the following five points.

- I. To fight with, or oppose, the servants, or subjects of Government.
- II. To neglect, and set at naught the orders of Government, with a view to resist its authority.
- III. To aid and assist or in anyway take part with those who are in open opposition to Government.
- IV. To show a turbulent disposition, and such as is likely to lead to a lawless riot, and disregard of the authority of Government.
- V. To swerve at heart from respect and loyalty to the Government; and in times of trouble, to withhold from it an active support.⁶⁴

With such a comprehensive list it would be difficult to exclude anyone from having

⁶² *ibid*, p. 108.

⁶³ Malik, p. 110.

participated in some form of treason, and the Sayyid acknowledged this especially in light of the fifth point wherein to "swerve at heart" is considered an offense of "no small weight." However his central belief seems have to been that the primary causes for insurrection were "everywhere the same ... Universal rebellion must arise from universal grounds for discontent or from streams deriving from many different sources, but finally merging into one wide-spreading, turbulent water."⁶⁵ He therefore completely rejected the notion of unicausal explanations for the event which British writers eagerly supported in post-1857 literature. The Sayyid maintained that there were in fact five main causes of the rebellion:

- I. Ignorance on the part of the people: by which I mean misapprehension of the intentions of Government.
- II. The passing of such laws and regulations and forms of procedure as joined with the established custom and practice of Hindustan, and the introduction of such as were in themselves objectionable.
- III. Ignorance on the part of the Government of the conditions of the people; of their modes of thought and of life; and of the grievances through which their hearts were becoming estranged.
- IV. The neglect on the part of our rulers of such points as were essential to the good government of Hindustan.
- V. The bad management, and disaffection of the army.⁶⁶

Pertaining to the first cause, Sayyid Ahmad Khan focused on the people's belief that their religion and ways of life were being supplanted by Christianity through missionary activity sponsored by the Government. The Sayyid acknowledged that this belief was erroneous, but noted that public opinion had found support in the practices of

⁶⁴ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History of, p. 155-166.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 116.

missionaries, especially during the drought and famine of 1837, when Hindu and Muslim orphans were raised as believers in Christ. The Sayyid said that proselytizing was not new to Indians but what was new was the "violent and unmeasured language" missionaries used to degrade those of other faiths, along with their choice of public venues for preaching such as bazaars or fairs. "In Hindustan these things have always been managed very differently. Every man in this country, preaches and explains his views in his own mosque, or his own house."⁶⁷ If it had been up to Reverend E. Edmond, Sayyid Ahmad Khan argued there ideally wouldn't even have been any "views" expressed but those of the Christians. Writing from Calcutta in 1855, the Reverend's letter was sent to all of the principle government offices and circulated publicly. It represented the extreme end that missionary opinion could take.

The time appears to have come when earnest consideration should be given to the subject, whether or not all men should embrace the same system of religion. Railways, steam vessels and the electric telegraph are rapidly uniting all the nations of the earth: the more they are brought together, the more certain does the conclusion be come that all have the same wants, the same anxieties, the same hopes, the same fears, and therefore, the same nature and the same origin.⁶⁸

Although Edmond's call represented popular opinion neither in the Government nor in public, a proclamation by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal stating just that,⁶⁹ had not been enough for Indians who were already suspicious of changes in the curriculums of

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 124.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 126.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, Appendix I, p. 149.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 129.

village schools, and the supremacy of English over Sanskrit, Persian, or Arabic as the true language of power.

A second cause of the uprising, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the set of laws enacted by the British East India Company which were viewed by the public as being "odious", "strange" or simply lacking in good sense. The Sayyid believed that the Legislative Council in Calcutta was "not free from the charge of having meddled with religious matters", especially in regards to the Religious Disabilities Act XXI of 1850. Prejudicial to both Muslims and Hindus it disallowed converts to either faith from inheriting their parents' property yet did not apply the same rule for those who converted to Christianity. As conversion to Hinduism was technically impossible before the 20th century, the act only had applied to Muslims.⁷⁰

But for Sayyid Ahmad Khan the most serious consequences were to be found in regulation VI of 1819 which demanded the resumption of *la kharaj*, rent free lands, in the name of the Company. These lands had been granted special status by the first Mughal Emperors and were of various kinds: the *milk* lands were given for mosques, temples, schools or scholars, while *Jagir* lands were given to those who had provided special services to the Court such as the Mughal officers of State. By confiscating these properties the Company had gained an extra 300,000 pounds sterling per year in tax revenues. "Almost all of this land was held by Muslims and their scholastic institutions,"⁷¹ said the Sayyid. To him it was a

⁷⁰ See Stephen Hay, Sources of Indian Tradition Volume II (New York: Columbia, 1998). p. 52-61.

remarkable fact that wherever the rebels [had] issued proclamations ... they have only mentioned two things: the one, interference in matters of religion, the other, the resumption of revenue free lands. It seems fair to infer that these were the two chief causes of the public discontent. More especially was it the case with the Muhammadans on whom this grievance fell far more heavily than on the Hindus.⁷²

Ignorance of the people's needs and expectations on behalf of their rulers became the Sayyid's third point for concern. He declared that when the British first came to India, it had not been uncommon for them to treat Indians as equals, to socialize with them or to take Indian wives. But as Calcutta had become more and more a hotter version of London, this had changed, as most English maintained a distance from Indian society and custom. Their governance was government in name only, and their ignorance of India prevented them from reaching an understanding of the average Indian's everyday needs and expectations.⁷³ District officers and lesser officials tended to treat public complaint harshly, if at all, leaving the people isolated, with "no champion" to represent them or to see that justice was done. When this attitude had been coupled with discriminatory British recruitment policies for the army and civil administration, which denied Muslims "opportunities for respectable careers", the result became predictable in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's view. Rather than starve, people chose to fight. "Many took service upon one anna and a half per diem and many, instead of cash, received a couple or perhaps three pounds of grain daily."⁷⁴ Who could be blamed for wanting to eat? Not

⁷¹ Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. 113.

⁷² Sayyid Ahmad Khan History, p. 131.

⁷³ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History, p.130.

those *zamindars* and cultivators who were denied their traditional *jagirs* (grants of land, pensions or presents of cash), and certainly not the petty artisans who "suffered severely" due to the opening of trade with an industrialized England. The Sayyid believed that with the end of native government came the demise of the Indian upper and middle classes, as well as a slow death for dyers, weavers, spinners and the like.

So, what could be done? The Sayyid's fourth cause explained the duties which the British ought to have fulfilled and those they did not. This was of particular interest because it offered insight into the Sayyid's ideas about social contract, and about how to maintain "friendly relations between the governors and the governed," as well as into his knowledge and appreciation of the Christian apostles, whose words he used to help establish his argument.

The English presence in India had existed for more than a century he observed, but up until 1857 it had not "secured the affections of the people." Similarly, there had been little intercourse between native Indians and the Turks and Pathans who had been amongst the first Muslim groups to conquer the sub-continent. What the English and early Muslim rulers shared was a lack of cordiality towards the people, and the will to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with them. Favoritism towards one's own kind was understandable but also destructive, he argued. In the case of Muslims, the Sayyid believed that religion, race, and custom contributed to this.

It must be borne in mind that the blood of the
Muhammadan conquerors and that of the people of the
country was not the same; that their faith was not the same;
their manners and customs not the same; that in their hearts

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 136.

the people did not like them.⁷⁵

The British Government was

...of course, perfectly right in maintaining special friendly relations with its Christian subjects (the English), but it was at the same time incumbent upon it to show towards its native subjects that brotherly kindness which the Apostle Paul exhorts us to in these words: "And to godliness, brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness, charity" (II Peter 1:7)⁷⁶

Idealistic as it may have seemed, it was in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's view the duty of government to inculcate "friendship and love" towards and between all citizens for the benefit and prosperity of the ruled country. If the British were able to follow the laws of their prophet, Jesus Christ, the task would be a simple one--"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men"⁷⁷ In the Sayyid's opinion there were such men to draw upon--British administrators who were sensitive to the needs of people and who "have earned that blessing which Christ enunciated: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom in heaven." (Matthew, v.3) ... They have also let their light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven."⁷⁸ Common religious and cultural traditions were held by the Sayyid to be irrelevant in the pursuit of amalgamation and cooperation.

We have numerous instances in which foreigners and natives of countries have been brought in contact with each other and of their becoming friends, even when their religions and countries were different and widely separated.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p. 139.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 139.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 141.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 141.

And why was this? Just because they wished and did their utmost to become so. How often do we not see strifes and enmities between people of the same race, religion, and customs? Friendship, intercourse, and sympathy are, therefore, not wholly dependent for their existence merely on the giver and recipient being of the same religion, race or country.⁷⁹

The question remained for him then, what was relevant and necessary to create the atmosphere which would spawn such friendships? Generally, thought Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the British were to stop "treating the Indians with contempt," especially those of authority such as the *Amlah* or native court officials. To allow the British rulers to acquaint themselves more with the Indian public, however superficially, the Sayyid wished for more *Durbars*, the grand state processions or courts, to be held by the Governor General. But the Sayyid's ultimate solution to all Anglo/Indian problems was as logical as it was bold for the time--the inclusions of Indians in the Legislative Council as responsible and capable policy makers. Had this step been considered previously, he thought the Rebellion would have never happened.

[The British] Government could never know the inadvisability of the laws and regulations which it passed...The people had no means of protesting against what they might feel to be a foolish measure, or of giving public expressions to their own wishes...At last came the time when all men looked upon the English Government as slow poison, a rope of sand, a treacherous flame of fire.⁸⁰

The Sayyid was at once ambitious and cautious. The idea of an all-Indian Parliament was dismissed as being out of the question and "useless" due to the ignorance and lack of

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 138.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 123.

education from which the majority of Indians suffered. The Sayyid did not envision a democratic election process, and he assumed that appointments would more likely be made to the Legislative Council according to social prominence--"Government of the people, for the people, by the best of the people."⁸¹ The "best of the people" were in his view, those who were chosen by God, a notion akin to the divine right of kings.

The only real kingdom is that of the Almighty who created the world. He however, made the kings of this world as a type of what He Himself is, in order that man, on seeing his sovereign, should recollect that there is the still greater one who made him... It is, therefore, incumbent on earthly kings to treat their subjects with that bountiful liberality with which the Almighty has treated the whole world.⁸²

As Farzana Shaikh has indicated, "Sayyid Ahmad expected officials to understand that by representation he meant neither the claim to a popular mandate, nor the institutions of self-government. On the contrary, what he did hope to convey was a notion of representation as the co-optation of Indian notables who would act as sounding boards in the service of government."⁸³

It is difficult to determine what impact the Sayyid's writings had on the formulation of government policy after the events of 1857. Did they influence the India Office's thinking back in London? If the condition of their original copy of the *Asab-i Baghawat-i Hind*, "heavily marked and annotated" by the time of the Sayyid's visit to England in 1861, can be used as an indicator, then we must say yes. We can also look for information of his influence to the Indian Council's Act of 1861 which admitted the

⁸¹ Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. 119.

⁸²Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History of , p. 143.

Raja of Benares, the Maharaja of Patiala and Sir Dinkar Rao, to its eighteen-man Legislative Council, on which Sayyid Ahmad Khan also served from 1878 to 1882.⁸⁴ Did the *Asab* have any influence on Indians in general, and on Muslims in particular, at home? Of and in itself, the *Asab* probably had little direct impact on Indian Muslims since almost all of the 500 copies printed were sent to people in power in London. Only one was even sent to the Government of India in Calcutta.⁸⁵ The implications to be drawn from the Sayyid's work, which called for the acceptance of the British and hence of certain of their cultural traditions, would have placed incredible demands on a population which was at best indifferent towards the Anglo/Christian presence. The Sayyid would devote the rest of his life to change this indifference, and in the process he attempted to breakdown social and sectarian differences and to expand both the "particularist" and "universalist" loyalties of Indian Muslims in order to create a stronger society

⁸³ Shaikh, Community and Consensus, p. 85.

⁸⁴ Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. 123.

⁸⁵ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, History of , p. viii.

CHAPTER 3
 NASARA: TO HELP
 SAYYID AHMAD KHAN'S EFFORTS FOR SOCIETAL
 AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Writing about the difficulties of reconciling "Enlightenment and Islam", Dietrich Reetz opens his enquiry by citing an Urdu poem of Mawlani Awlad Hasan, written c.1868, and entitled *Risalah Jihadiyah* (Treatise on War).

Religion of Islam is on the decline. Domination of infidelity is ruining Islam. Had our forefathers not waged *jihad*, India would not have flourished with Islam. The power of sword ensured the domination of Muslims, had our forefathers been idle, what would have happened to Islam.⁸⁶

Reetz suggests that "This poem truly reflected the state of mind among Muslim religious leaders and social reformers in India... Their perception was that Indian Muslims who constituted 21 percent of the population felt beleaguered both in their true faith and in their social status as compared to other sections of society."⁸⁷ Yet, Reetz admits that "by no means did Indian Muslims constitute a coherent social or ethnic community." The question to ask then is how could a few couplets encompass the visions and thoughts of

⁸⁶ Dietrich Reetz, "Enlightenment and Islam: Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Plea To Indian Muslims For Reason", *The Indian Historical Review*, 14 (1987-88), p. 206-218, pp. 206.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 206.

an entire intelligentsia? As one considers other works by Hasan, such as his *Rah-i Sunnat* (The Way of the Sunna), which condemns loyalty and cooperation with the British, or *Haraq al Ashrar* (Burner of the Wicked), which speaks vehemently against the adoption of both Hindu and Shia cultural patterns, one realizes that his work represents perhaps only the opinion of the *ulama* or the *mujahidin*, and not necessarily that of the Islamic community at large.

By definition, *mujahidin* are those who wage war against non-believers or enemies of the faith. They are thought of as renewers of religious law, a "special community" which claimed access to the true teachings of Islam, and a commitment to the original revelation. In India, a prominent *mujahidid* was Shah Waliy'ullah (1703-1762). Like his contemporary, 'Abd al-Wahhab of Arabia (1703-1792) from whom conservative *Wahhabi's* take their name, Waliy'ullah was keenly aware of the social and political disintegration of his religious community in India. Waliy'ullah believed that this decline would continue unabated without political power, and those Muslim leaders who followed him - such as Shah 'Abd al Aziz (1746-1842), Maulana Shah Muhammad Isma'il (1781-1831), and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid of Ra'e Bareli (1786-1831) - came to the same conclusion. According to Zobairi, "None of them could conceive of a Muslim renaissance without political authority; it was only in an Islamic state that true Islam could be practiced."⁸⁸ As noted earlier, Shah 'Abd al Aziz declared India *dar al-harb* in 1803 by religious *fatwa* (decree). In theory this demanded that Muslims should attempt

⁸⁸ R.H. Zobairi, "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Interpretation of Muslim Society and His Reform Movement in the Indian Context", *Islamic Culture*, 57 (1983), p. 171-192, pp. 171.

to restore their political authority through *jihad*. Sayyid Ahmad Shahid responded by doing more than gathering an army to fight the Sikhs of the Punjab, who were accused of interfering with Muslim customs. "There were many who advised me to carry on *jihad* in India," he said, "promising to provide me with whatever is necessary by way of material, treasure and weapons. But I could not agree to this, for *jihad* must be in accordance with the *sunnah*. Mere rebellion was not intended." And with those words he began a *mujahidin* reform movement which fought against the enemies of Islam well into the 1860's.⁸⁹

Yet, despite their sincerity on behalf of their religion, Sayyid Ahmad Khan had grave doubts as to whether or not the *mujahidin* understood certain obligations that were required by it. Pertaining to the concept of *jihad*, they had in his view misunderstood both its context and its meaning. In The Loyal Mohammedans of India (1860), the Sayyid wrote

Jihad, according to the principles of Mohammedan faith, really cannot take place under the present regime... The British have obtained domination in Hindoostan by two modes viz., by conquest and cession. In either case, the Mohammedans have, as a natural consequence, become their subjects, and enjoy peace and protection under their administration, while the Government reposes confidence in their loyalty and submission. How then could the Mohammedans rise against the government in a *jihad*, when the very first condition of a religious war is that there should not subsist the relations of protected and protectors between the crusaders, and those against whom the crusade is undertaken?⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Barbara D. Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900 (Princeton: University Press, 1982), p. 62.

⁹⁰ Shan Mohammed, Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications Ltd.), p. 44.

He then pointed out that there were two "indispensable requisites" to a *jihad*, and he stressed the historical precedent which allowed Muslims to live and prosper under a ruler of different creed. He thus wrote,

First, there [should] be no *ummum* or protection, and secondly, that there should be no treaty or engagement between the parties. The precedent for this is found in the *Touret*, or Book of Moses, where it is recorded, that Joseph served Potiphar, King of Egypt, ...although Potiphar was not a Jew (see Genesis ch.XXXIX). In like manner the Mohammedans dwell in obedience to the laws and Government of the British...this obedience is nothing more than the proper and bounden duty of their Mohammedan subjects, as inculcated and enforced by the precepts of our religion.⁹¹

But this position would attract few followers from the *ulama* or the *mujahidin* as it seemed to be almost secular, dividing the political and personal realms of religious obligation. Such notions were lost on men such as Abul A'la Mawdudi (c.1903-1979), who supported the creation of Pakistan as Amir (leader) and founder of the *Jama'at-i Islami* (The Islamic Organization) in 1941. He would write that Muslims were obliged to come forward and initiate *jihad* if an Islamic state came under *any* kind of attack, even one that questioned or smudged the religion's "prestige".⁹² If the *Mujahidin* can be collectively referred to as being "scripturalist"⁹³, then Mawdudi would best be described under more recent terminology as a fundamentalist. But both stressed the necessity of *jihad* in its base form-- *jihad-i asghar*, the "lesser *jihad*" which considers political and

⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 44-45.

⁹² A.A. Mawdudi, Towards Understanding Islam Lahore, Idara Tarjuman-*ui*-Qur'an, 1986, p. 93.

⁹³ This term is from Clifford Gertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven, 1968)

military action as paramount, the holy war that we are so familiar with in the West.

Eschewing politics and war for what he considered to be a more ethical alternative, Sayyid Ahmad Khan sought societal change and prosperity through another form of *jihad*, the *jihad-i akbar*, the "greater *jihad*" which stresses one's personal struggle in life, through commitment to Islam, and the development of individual morality and discipline as the pillars of a healthy society. He believed that some of the *ulama's* attempts to preserve the "legacy of medieval Islam" by denying reason and shunning Western thought and sciences in general were futile and crippling to present and future generations. "Gone is the age of faith during which everything, however strange, was accepted on authority," said Sayyid Ahmad. "We now live in a new age--the age of skepticism--in which nothing can be accepted as law unless it satisfies human reason."⁹⁴ Therefore, it became his goal to use the criterion of reason as a remedy and a catalyst for the Muslim community's development in order to demonstrate the validity and vitality of Islam in a changing world, and the necessity of education in order to understand and survive in it.⁹⁵ This strategy would be manifest in his comprehensive reform program culminating in a new Muslim theology and the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh.

The appeal to reason which Sayyid Ahmad Khan would pursue was not in itself spawned by cross-cultural contacts. In part, it was a response or challenge to traditional beliefs which held that from the medieval period on, no further intellectual efforts were

⁹⁴ Zobairi, p. 172.

⁹⁵ See Madhui Yasin, *Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: An Evaluation in Historical Perspective*, Studies in

required by Muslims other than their support of *taqlid* or authoritative opinion. This approach was based on the assumption that by the tenth century there were no new ideas worthy of attention. According to some, all original or worthwhile thinking had already been done, so that the Qur'an, and the example of the Prophet Mohammed and writings of scholarly jurists, were the only paths for people to follow. As has often been stated, this situation seemed to indicate that the "gates of *ijtihad*" (fresh or independent thinking) had been closed. But who had closed them? The answer is not clear, although a recent scholar, Fazlur Rahman, has suggested that the gate was never formally shut to begin with.

Nobody quite knows when the gate of *ijtihad* was closed or who exactly closed it...There is no statement to be found anywhere by anyone about the desirability or the necessity of such a closure, or the fact of actually closing the gate, although one finds judgment by later writers that the gate of *ijtihad* has been closed.⁹⁶

Nonetheless, even if the gate had never been officially closed, it appears that the hinges had seized over time. This helped to provide the *ulama* and staunch traditionalists, as were most of the *mujahidin*, with a monopoly on *fiqh* (jurisprudence; the discipline of elucidating the *shar'ia*; also the resultant body of rules) which was strengthened by the public's dependence on *taqlid*. Left unchallenged, this situation meant that scientific values and the quality of Muslim life would have to be sacrificed in favour of a content *ulama* and a static vision of Islam, which was incompatible with progress and thus estranged from its mission to enlighten its followers. In the use of

Islam, 19 (1985), p. 151-165.

⁹⁶ Fazlur Rahman, Islamic Methodology in History, (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965),

ijtihad the Sayyid hoped to elevate or sharpen the community's intellect by encouraging them to abandon traditional thought- patterns in all areas of life, and to think critically for themselves. He was influenced on this subject by Shah Waliy'ullah , who also desired that Islam be presented in a rational manner. This underlies his faith in Muslims to make responsible decisions.⁹⁷

As a young man, before the 1850's, Sayyid Ahmad Khan empathized greatly with those members of the *mujahidin* with whom he came into contact. The thoughts of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid of Ra'e Bareli and Maulana Shah Muhammed Isma'il in particular stirred his imagination because of the religious outlook shared by the two leaders.⁹⁸ Both men wanted to stress *tauhid* (unity; unity of the Godhead) in its purest form which necessitated a return to the Islam practiced by the Prophet Mohammed, and both discouraged innovation of Islam's traditional structure by limiting the parameters of social thought and conduct to those prescribed in the Qur'an and *sunnah*. In their insistence that ritual prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, assertion of unity, and the giving of alms, the five pillars of Islam, be implemented in their pristine form, can be found a direct challenge against what they saw as the corrupt cultural landscape that the sub-continent provided. As Troll characterized their view,

The most serious threat to *tauhid* in India [came] from Hindu practices that have crept into the life and thought of Indian Muslims. Thus, to a very large extent, the fight

p. 149.

⁹⁷ S. M^cDonough, Muslim Ethics and Modernity-A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), p. 40-41

⁹⁸ C.W. Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan-A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology (New Dehli: Vikas, 1978), p. 34-35.

against innovation turns out to be a fight against borrowing from Hinduism, or, as they saw it, superstitious degradations shared with Hinduism.⁹⁹

It is important to keep in mind that Sayyid Ahmad Khan's religious views were hardly crystallized during the 1850's, and he would later admit that they lacked in depth and reflection at that time. However, it is clear that by 1883 he did not perceive so called Hindu "degradation" as an obstacle to unity or societal reform. In his view, the very geography of the land necessitated and encouraged synthesis. The Sayyid delivered a speech in Patna on January 27, 1883, in which he said

The Muslims have acquired hundreds of customs from the Hindus and the Hindus have also learned hundreds of things from the Mussulmans. We mixed with each other so much that we produced a new language--*Urdu*, which was neither our language or theirs. Thus if we ignore that aspect of ours which we owe to God, both of us, on the basis of being common inhabitants of India, actually constitute one nation; and the progress of this country and that of both of us is possible through mutual cooperation, sympathy and love.¹⁰⁰

The greatest obstacles to overcome were blind acceptance of customs and traditions, and ignorance in the form of superstition and supernatural beliefs, other than in God.

Any religion which is true or claims to be true cannot contain such elements in it as are contrary to nature and offend human reason, so that a sensible person would find it impossible to believe in them. A true faith in its pristine purity, is absolutely free from such supernatural and irrational elements. It is always at a later time that those who hanker for the supernatural interpolate into it supernatural and miraculous elements. I am sincerely convinced about Islam that it is absolutely free from such strange stories and unnatural and irrational mysteries. May

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ Shan Mohammed, Writings and Speeches of, p. 160.

God save us from such mystery worshippers.¹⁰¹

This rejection of the supernatural implied that the findings of modern science must align with true religion. Thus, Sayyid Ahmad Khan stated that the "work of God" as seen in the physical world and the heavens must agree with the "word of God", as provided in the Qur'an.

Whatever God has said in the Glorious Qur'an about the things that exist in the world and the created being is either absolutely or in some respect or other, in accordance with reality. It is not possible that what He declares be opposed to what He has created or vice versa...agreement between the Word and the Work of God is essential. If the word is not according to the work then such word cannot be the word of God.¹⁰²

As Sheila M^cDonough has argued, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Sayyid's views pertaining to rationality and reform follow from the thoughts of two other Muslim ethicists/reformers, namely, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) and Fakhi al-Din al-Razi (1149-1209).¹⁰³ Al-Ghazzali's celebrated work *Ihya'ulum al-Din* (The Revivification of the Sciences of Religion) was particularly venerated by the Sayyid as its primary contention was that belief (*iman*) could not be perfected without the integration of faith and philosophic rationality.¹⁰⁴ One wonders if Sayyid Ahmad Khan might have realized a certain affinity with al-Ghazzali in that both were vilified by their co-religionists for their

¹⁰¹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Ahkri Madamin*, as cited in M.A. Jawed, "Principles of Movement In Modern Islam: An Analysis of Some Ideas Developed in the 19th and 20th Centuries by Indo-Pakistani Muslims in Justification of Change in Religious Thought and Structure" *Islamic Studies*, 9 (1970), p.295-315, pp. 304.

¹⁰² *ibid*, p. 304.

¹⁰³ S. M^cDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity-A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), p. 29.

efforts and opinions. However, the Sayyid was exposed to European ethics too, via Montesquieu and Montaigne during a trip to England from 1869-1870. He was also impressed with the powerful writings on morals and manners provided by Sir Richard Steele's Tatler and The Spectator of Joseph Addison.¹⁰⁵ By using the printing press as a medium of communication to spread his ideas, the Sayyid merged the old and the new together to produce *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, or, The Muhammadan Social Reformer.

The *Tahdhib* appeared monthly, published in Urdu from Christmas Eve 1870 to February of 1897, with two notable interruptions. In each article that the Sayyid wrote he critically examined social vices and asked Muslims for change. Marriage, divorce, friendship, self-respect, cleanliness, national solidarity, selfishness, flattery, hypocrisy, punctuality, speech and honesty--the list of topics was extensive to the point of becoming overwhelming. But as he believed, "These vices seem to be numerous, but they are so intimately inter-related that if one is rectified the others would also begin to disappear."¹⁰⁶ The first edition of *Tahdhib* coincided with the inaugural meeting of the Sayyid's "Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among the Muhammadans of India." The journal's objectives were announced as follows.

The chief purpose behind publishing this journal is to persuade the Indian Muslims to develop the best kind of civilization, so that the contempt with which civilized nations of the world look at them is removed, and the Muslims may also be reckoned among the respected and civilized people.

¹⁰⁴ C.W. Troll, p. 209.

¹⁰⁵ M^cDonough, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Maqalat-i Sar Sayyid, as cited in Zobairi, "Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan's Interpretation of Muslim Society and His Reform Movement in the Indian Context", Islamic Culture, 57 (1983), p. 186.

Sultan 'Abd al-Aziz of Turkey...set up a committee of scholars and ministers to inquire whether Islam was really incompatible with civilization. The following sentences appear in the report of the committee: "Islam possesses all the truths and qualities that contribute to the attainment of worldly success, and lead humanity to civilization and perfection. But in order to attain progress we have to give up many of our traditional customs and habits which might have been useful in the past but which have become definitely harmful in the present age."

We can become truly civilized only if we take a hard look at our situation, examine those customs and habits which are a hindrance to progress, and locate their sources and causes...We should keep comparing our practices with our religious principles, so that we know which practices should be given up altogether and which should be reformed according to the injunctions of the *shari'ah*. There is no task greater than this in the present age.¹⁰⁷

According to the Sayyid, the Muslim community was in need of some introspection. Using "religious principles" as a touchstone for individual and societal progress was to suggest that some Muslims were not very Muslim at all. Thus, the Islam that they practiced was tainted and had become something else.

Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology (*'ilm al-kalam*), whereby we should either refute doctrines of modern sciences, or undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with Islam. If we are to propagate those sciences amongst the Muslims, about which I have just stated how much they disagree with the present day Islam, then it is my duty to defend as much as I can the religion of Islam, rightly or wrongly, and to reveal to people the original bright face of Islam. My conscience tells me that if I should not do so, I would stand as a sinner before God.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Maqalat-i Sar Sayyid, as cited in Zobairi, p. 175.

¹⁰⁸ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Maqalat-i Sar Sayyid, as cited in Zobairi, p. 175-176.

The *Tahdhib* was meant to provide support for this 'ilm al-kalam and diffuse the Sayyid's ideas about history and the nature of society. To him, the social degeneration that engulfed the community was not of a permanent nature--it was transitory. It was also a practical opportunity in that it allowed for better times ahead, as nature and history continued their work, and as human beings continued to learn. He viewed history like the human body, as a biological entity that goes through various stages from infancy to old age. Old age is therefore a time of decay but it is certainly not an absolute end. In decay is offered a chance for resurrection, a chance for progress, in the same sense that, when one dies, society continues either touched for the better or marred by the influence of one's individual existence. Thus, the quality of a society depends upon the quality of individuals that reside within it. The Sayyid said that "Unless the individual realizes the necessity for a social transformation and undergoes a change in his own thinking and activity...it is futile to effect any modification in social laws and institutions, for their effective functioning depends upon the receptivity of individuals."¹⁰⁹

Believing that perfection exists with God alone, in his "word" and "work", the Sayyid recognized all else as being imperfect. In terms of human achievement he thought the Prophet Mohammed represented the highest virtues one could hope to obtain. After all, he was chosen by Allah to deliver the Revelation, and to help followers understand and apply the message to their personal lives and societal institutions. Mohammed's "beauty was enhanced by his utter moral goodness, he was not angry ever, nor

¹⁰⁹ I. Topa, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan-A Study in Social Thought" *Islamic Culture*, 27 (1953), p. 225-241, pp. 227.

revengeful, except when God's rights were at issue. He was courageous and most generous especially with the poor and with travelers; yet regarding his own needs he was parsimonious. He showed modesty in his conduct, was forbearing and humble and free from envy and lust."¹¹⁰ The Qur'an, "teaches the virtues that make such goodness possible and warns against the vices that militate against the development of such qualities of character."¹¹¹

The prejudiced bigot, on the other hand, displays the lowest virtues humans are capable of. Prejudice was the great enemy of progress which divided one nation from another, and the individual from society. Bigots, concerned with self-satisfaction and self-absorption, became alienated from the real world, distanced from the needs of others, and immune to meaningful dialogue and reasoning. Pertaining to religion, prejudice made for an intolerant individual who was neither prepared to rationally discuss his faith, nor appreciate the beliefs of others. Furthermore, pertaining to the congregation, their behavior placed them at odds with Islam.

It [prejudice] keeps a man from acquiring good habits. Even if one considers a certain act to be good, his prejudice often makes him hesitate to perform it. Such a person is likely to shirk the good and continue to remain entangled in evil.¹¹²

The *'ilm al-kalam* was based on the Sayyid's belief that true Islam had become obscured over time by extensive commentaries and *hadith* literature. Written before the

¹¹⁰ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Jila al qulub bi dhiki al-mahbub*, 1842, as cited in McDonough, Muslim Ethics, p. 39.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p. 37-39.

¹¹² Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat-i Sar Sayyid*, as cited in Zobairi, "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Interpretation of Muslim Society and His Reform Movement in the Indian Context", Islamic Culture, 57 (1983), p. 182.

arrival of modern science and knowledge, those who wrote such works only had ancient and medieval examples from which to form their dialogues. Fables and stories which were popular during their own lifetimes were also used, and in light of modern research many seemed questionable to say the least. One might say that many *hadith* were embarrassing to the educated Muslim who knew all too well that they were often the products of vivid imaginations.

In Sayyid Ahmad Khan's view assemblages of *hadith* suffered from the tendency of many Muslims to "ascribe undue sanctity" to everything and anything recorded as a practice of Mohammed. And this, in fact, was the Sayyid's main argument against *hadith* because, "the Prophet himself made it quite clear that not all he said or did (the Qur'an alone excepted) constitutes revelation...".¹¹³ Believing that most *hadith* were not authentic, the Sayyid saw them as a hindrance to progress, causing dissension and confusion in the community, which is why the first two *Caliphs* (vicegerent, deputy, or successor) after the Prophet had banned their collection. But over time, the knowledge of *hadith* became equated with respectability and learning among Muslims. The more *hadith* one could recite, the more prestige one would have, and thus arose many so called *hadith* with questionable pedigrees. The Sayyid pointed out that serious Muslim scholars had explained this problem and that later compilations of *hadith* were generally more reliable. However, there remained many examples which defied reason and those were to be rejected on the following basis:

- 1) A *hadith* which contradicts any of the Qur'anic

¹¹³ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat-i Sar Sayyid*, as cited in M. Siddiqi, "Religious Thought of Sir Sayeed Ahmad Khan" *Islamic Studies*, 6 (1967), p.298-308, pp. 293.

injunctions;

2) A *hadith* purporting to describe the conditions of an existent object on the basis of revelation, but description of which does not correspond to the true nature of that object;

3) A *hadith* which describes a historical event, the authenticity of which has been disproved by later research;

4) A *hadith* referring to an incident which, in the event of its occurrence, should have been witnessed by a large number of people, but was recorded on the evidence of one person alone;

5) A *hadith* referring to something which was necessary for everyone to know, but was told only to the narrator;

6) A *hadith* violating the laws and principles of Islam which had already been verified and established authentically;

7) A *hadith* describing wonders beyond the grasp of human reason and not supported by revelation.¹¹⁴

The next step would involve an examination of the Qur'an, the primary source of Islam, which Sayyid Ahmad Khan would find to be in perfect harmony with reason and therefore capable of rational explanation. "It is [proven in the message of] the Qur'an that the Prophet did not bring forth any claim to the miracles...We declare openly that there is no proof of the occurrence of anything supernatural, which, it is asserted, is the miracle."

¹¹⁵ But what, asked the Sayyid, of the story of Jonah, swallowed by the whale, or Adam and the existence of Satan? His answer lay in recognizing subtleties of speech within the Arabic lexicon, and the use of allusions, metaphors and similes such as "we shall roll up the heavens as a recorder rolleth up a written scroll."¹¹⁶ These devices were used in recognition of the fact that difficult concepts, such as resurrection, the nature of the soul,

¹¹⁴ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat-i Sar Sayyid*, as cited in Zobairi, "Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan's Interpretation of Muslim Society and His Reform Movement in the Indian Context", *Islamic Culture*, 57 (1983), p. 178.

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 179.

¹¹⁶ The Holy Qur'an, 21, 104, p. 944.

or prophethood itself, would not be understood by everyone because of different grades of intelligence. "That is why He whose state is great and glorious has unfolded them [different subjects] by allegories which suit human understanding and has disclosed the pleasure of the hereafter in terms of the highest men yearn after, and the pains thereof in terms of the utmost of what horrifies."¹¹⁷ If one could convey the true meaning of the Qur'an so that it could be understood by everyone, then this knowledge would strengthen their faith and hence the development of the community. Not only this, this knowledge would curb the power of certain *mullahs* (religious divines) and some of the *ulama* who thought it unwise to divulge too much information to the public.

The allegorical representation of religion in the present age is not enough. What was known only to the few in the past should now be disclosed to common people so that they become acquainted with the truth, and with the secrets of religion, and thus become wholly convinced of the validity of their faith. One should not be afraid of being declared a non believer by a bigoted *mulla* because one refuses to believe literally such things as retribution in the grave, the ascension of the Prophet to Heaven, and the separate existence of Satan. In the past Ghazali, Shah Waliyullah and others who attempted to explore the secrets of faith and make them clear to the people, were also declared heretics by the fanatical *mullas*.¹¹⁸

This position involved far more than just semantics, for the practical implications of the Qur'anic exegesis were revealed by the way in which they affected certain injunctions in the *shari'ah*. Some cultural traits or habits of Muslims which were thought to be supported by the Qur'an were, in fact, forbidden or discouraged and contrary to the

¹¹⁷ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tahrir Fi Usul al Tafsir*, as cited in Zobairi, "Sir Sayeed Ahmad Khan's Interpretation of Muslim Society and His Reform Movement in the Indian Context", *Islamic Culture*, 57 (1983), p. 179.

spirit of the Revelation. To Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in some cases they were practices which separated the civilized from the uncivilized, and reflected badly upon Muslims as enlightened peoples. The problem lay in the interpretation and weightage given to one *sura* over another in the case of contradiction or confusion. For example, the Sayyid found polygamy permissible but only under very rare circumstances which he did not clearly define. However, marriage between one man and one woman was considered by him most ideal due to the considerable responsibilities that union entailed, especially in terms of providing for one's family. Monogamy as discussed in *sura* 4:3, is held to be the most equitable form of marriage, always preferable to polygamy which he thought the exception. Slavery, on the other hand, was condemned outright by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who placed great stress on what has come to be known as the "verse of release", *sura* 47:4.¹¹⁹ The Sayyid suggested that, from the conquest of Mecca onward, slavery of any kind was forbidden to Muslims who would be better off in the eyes of God if they released their captives in His name. *Riba* (usury, interest) was deemed to be acceptable so long as it was reasonable and not applied to the poor. Preferably, it would be a practice levied only on those who could truly afford it, those who "...are people of standing who are rich and well- to- do and borrow money at interest for a life of ease and comfort and who purchase with it estates or build houses..."¹²⁰ The custom of *pardah* (seclusion) had many opponents, but the Sayyid did not address the practice as a social

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 180.

¹¹⁹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tafsir al-Qur'an Part I*, as cited in J.M.S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore: Orientalia, 1958), p. 37.

¹²⁰ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tafsir al-Quran Part I*, as cited in J.M.S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore: Orientalia, 1958), p. 38.

evil, or at least not as one which merited immediate attention. In his view it served its purpose, although the "purpose" was not clearly identified.¹²¹ However important these proposed amendments to the *shari'ah* were in terms of long term social refinement, they were of very limited immediate use because they would require time and sustained effort to be adopted by the community. The same can be said for Sayyid Ahmad Khan's attempts to broaden theological concepts and reduce superstitious beliefs, and he knew this.

There were nevertheless many in India and abroad who opposed his ideas on religion and his socializing with foreigners. His articles in *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* and his Qur'anic commentaries raised a "hurricane of protests", earning him the title of heretic, Christian, atheist and *Nechari* (naturalist). Several *fatwas* declared him a *kafir*. One *moulvi*, Ali Bakhsh Khan, even went to the *muftis* in Mecca in order to get a *fatwa* issued against the Sayyid based on his denial of the existence of angels and the devil, and his writings on slavery. Ali Bakhsh Khan argued "This man is erring and causes people to err, or rather he is an agent of the devil, and wants to seduce the Muslims, and *God* regards him as a [great] obstacle (*finta*) to true belief."¹²² Ali Bakhsh Khan received the *fatwa*. Furthermore, this *moulvi* maintained Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not qualified to recommend such courses of action, for he was neither steeped in the scholastic tradition nor warranted in granting such a great scope to the practice of *ijtihad*. Several independent publications seemed to agree, and papers such as the *Nur al-Afaq* and *Nur*

¹²¹ *ibid*, p. 41.

¹²² *ibid*, p. 91.

al-Anwar of Cawnpore, the *Lauh I Mahfuz* of Muradabad, and Agra's *Terhawin* were started to counter the influence of the *Tahdib*. Even the Sayyid's most trusted friend, Muhsin al-Mulk, felt compelled to voice his displeasure, and say to the Sayyid "Give me a medicine for my pain...but do not hurt me anew so that I must scream and bawl still more."¹²³

But the Sayyid declared that his intentions were to heal, not to cause more suffering. For a small group of followers who were like minded, such as Moulvi Chiragh Ali, Maulana Inayat Rasool Chirya-koti, and Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk, "It came to be that it was difficult to stick to the old ideas after reading his essays in the [*Tahdhib*]."¹²⁴ It would become even more difficult as Sayyid Ahmad Khan's efforts to "educate, educate, educate," crystallized into the founding of the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (MAO). This was the jewel in the crown of his pedagogical activities, and it would eventually prove to be most fruitful for Indian Muslims and Indians alike, but less so for the reputation of Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a man who was interested ultimately in the welfare of India as a whole, and not just in that of his own community.

Shortly after the mutiny, the Sayyid began his educational activities by publishing a *Review of Instruction* which was written in Urdu and English. In it he proposed that Urdu and other indigenous languages were inappropriate and unable to convey modern knowledge and concepts accurately. It was the Sayyid's "firm conviction that [the Government] should abolish in *toto* the system of imparting instruction in the Indian

¹²³ *ibid*, p. 97.

¹²⁴ Muhammad, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, p. 64.

vernacular and that it should only continue with English schools."¹²⁵ Thus, while he was *Sadr al-Sudur* in Ghazipur in 1864, he started the Victoria Memorial School, where rich Indians within the city, particularly the Hindu Raja Har Dev Narayan Singh, donated the funds necessary to begin multi-lingual education in English, Persian, Urdu, Arabic and Sanskrit. While this multi-lingual format appeared to contradict his program, his strategy was to introduce modern education and English slowly by associating them with familiar subjects. The pace was dictated by two factors. First, any system of education which was inaugurated by the British, or in any way associated with foreign concepts, was adamantly rejected by Muslims who believed that it was either below them or intended to wean them away from their past, their traditions and their religion. Second, the Sayyid had not yet developed a coherent strategy to encourage Muslims to accept modern education. His ideas were still vague, waiting to take form with his trip to England in 1869.¹²⁶ While there he toured the universities of Oxford and Cambridge with his son and interpreter Mahmud, and made detailed studies of their curricula, methodologies, residents and architecture. With the help of British engineers he prepared sketches, and decided upon Aligarh as the most appropriate location for his project over places such as Lucknow, Agra or Delhi. MAO was slowly beginning to take shape.

Returning home seventeen months later, the Sayyid felt it was time to accurately evaluate the Muslim response to modern education through the Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among the Muhammadans of India

¹²⁵ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Report to the Commission of Education, 1882, as cited in Baljon, The Reforms and, p. 45.

¹²⁶ Muhammad, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, p. 54.

(*Khwashtgaran-i-Taraqqi-i-Talim-i-Musalmanan*). This committee was intended to do three things: first, to determine the community's reasons for "ignoring" the study of western sciences; second, they were to "ascertain objectively" why Muslims did not take advantage of governmental programs to promote education; third, to recommend a course of action to eliminate any obstacles between Muslims and the educational system. The Muslim public was encouraged to participate by the Committee's offer of three cash prizes for the best essays on these subjects. Thirty-two essays were received, and from these the following obstacles emerged.

- 1) The absence of religious education in Government schools.
- 2) The responsibility of English education for creating disbelief in one's faith.
- 3) Corruption of morals, lowering standards of politeness and courtesy as by-products of western education.
- 4) Certain unwarranted prejudices against the study of English.
- 5) Absence of Muslims working with the Government to form educational policies.
- 6) Questionable notions of wealthy or prominent Muslims that it was a matter of shame to send their children to governmental institutions.
- 7) A preference for military over literary education.¹²⁷

There were 19 men on this committee over which the Sayyid presided as secretary. The conclusions they drew differed in many respects, polarized mainly between traditional and modern positions. But they seemed to agree that if anyone should provide for modern education amongst Muslims, it should be the Muslims themselves. Only in this manner, with a minimum of government involvement, could

¹²⁷ S.K. Bhatnagar History of the MAO College Aligarh (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1969), p. 35.

their efforts to preserve their traditions be best served. Pertaining to the prejudices against foreign wisdom, the Sayyid lamented the notion that bigoted Muslims thought so little of Islam as to believe that it could be so easily threatened by western literature and science. To the contrary, he believed that modern knowledge would only serve to prove the truth of Islam. He was also disturbed by the statistics he had gathered between 1858 and 1878 which indicated significant differences between the number of Muslim graduates from Government schools and Colleges and those from other (i.e. Hindu) communities, (Appendix I). He used this data to buttress his argument that the under-representation of Muslims in government service and professional work contributed to their poverty.

Despite these measures, Muslims at first remained conservative or cautious. Appreciating that people were slow to change, the Sayyid said that traditional education "was not bad, but the old thread with which the ribs had been tied was now broken and a new thread was needed to re-tie them."¹²⁸ He believed that progress would be impossible without higher education and discipline, and without both European and Indian educators. Even the fate of primary schooling depended upon the existence of a strong centre of Muslim education in India. He argued, "It is a natural phenomenon that the small imitate the great; not the great the small. Therefore, the opening of a great educational institute is a matter of utmost urgency in order to spread education in the lower states of society."¹²⁹ The Committee submitted a general recommendation "to look forward and to inaugurate an educational system for future generations."¹³⁰ The Sayyid used this occasion to

¹²⁸ Shan Muhammad, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, p. 58.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, p. 59.

suggest that they should concentrate specifically on the founding of an institute of high learning in order to deal with the urgency of the situation in all levels of society.

In April of 1872 the Muhammodan Anglo-Oriental College Fund Committee (*Khazinatu ul-baza'at-li Tasis-i-Madrasat-al-Musalmanan*) began to accept donations while the Sayyid went on tour to solicit funds from the cities and provinces. The public was informed of these activities via a number of articles published in *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*. The response was positive and somewhat unexpected, due to the persistent calls on true believers to ostracize the Sayyid and to ignore his school. From one of the very first donations of one rupee and two paise made by a religious divine in 1872, the Fund managed to collect three and one-half lakhs of rupees by the school's opening on May 24, 1875. This was a mammoth accomplishment. On that occasion, addressing Lord Lytton, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India from 1876 to 1880, the Sayyid proclaimed

From the seed we sow today there may spring up a mighty tree whose branches, like those of the Banyan of the soil, should in their turn strike firm roots into the Earth and themselves send forth new and vigorous saplings...whose sons should go forth throughout the length and breadth of the land to preach the gospel of free enquiry, of large hearted toleration and of pure morality.¹³¹

The soil on which that banyan would depend consisted of an all-encompassing curriculum, secular and theological, Indian and European, and, unique in India for the time, a residency requirement for most students. This latter feature was intended to "maintain the homogeneity of the Islamic brotherhood and to create a sense of oneness

¹³⁰ Bhatnagar, *History of MAO*, p. 36.

among the Hindus and Muslims." Opening the college doors to all alike, the Sayyid believed that "If the two (Hindus and Muslims) sat together on the same benches, lived in the same boarding houses, partook of the same ambrosia of knowledge from the same hands, the two might acquire feelings of sympathy for each other."¹³² Not surprisingly, there would always be questions as to the true character of MAO asked by Muslims and Hindus alike. If it can not be denied that it was created mainly with Muslims in mind, it also promoted the Sayyid's academic cross-communal ideal and his vision of a dynamic and united Indian populace. He said:

I shall feel sorry if anybody thinks that this college has been established so as to show discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. The main reason behind the establishment of this institution, as I am sure all of you know, was the wretched dependence of the Muslims, which had been debasing their position day after day. Their religious fanaticism did not let them avail the education facilities provided by the government schools and colleges. It was, therefore, deemed necessary to make some special arrangement for their education. Suppose, for example, there are two brothers, one of them is quite hale and hearty but the other is diseased. His health is on the decline. Thus it is the duty of all brothers to take care of their ailing brother and bear the hands in his trouble. This was the very idea which goaded me to establish the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College. But I am pleased to say that both the brothers get the same education in this college... There is no distinction whatsoever between Hindus and Muslims. Only one who strives hard can lay claim to get the award. Here in this College both Hindus as well as Muslims are entitled to get the stipends and both of them are treated at par as boarders. I regard both Hindus and Muslims as my two eyes.¹³³

¹³¹ Bhatnagar, History of MAO, p. iii.

¹³² *ibid*, p. 18.

¹³³ *ibid*, p. ix.

Sunni and *Shia* students, at the new college, were required to perform *Namaz* (congregational prayers) five times a day at one of the two mosques on campus, but were banned from discussing their sectarian differences. They had to wear a uniform consisting of a black gown and red *fez* while everyone was required to wear shoes and socks. Students shared the same food, exercised together, studied together and faced the same punishments for wearing long hair, smoking, or a lack of punctuality. Cow slaughter was prohibited as a gesture as to Hindu-Muslim unity.

There were three departments at Aligarh. The English Department, where the medium of instruction was in English, the Urdu Department, and the Arabic and Persian Departments which concerned themselves with language and cultural studies. The specific subjects offered, as of 1877, were as follows;

- 1) Languages- English, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit,
- 2) Moral Sciences- Logic, Rhetoric, Mental and Moral Philosophy and the Science of History,
- 3) Natural Philosophy, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences, and
- 4) Islamic Law, Jurisprudence and Theology.¹³⁴

The Sayyid would have liked to include German, French, Greek and Latin, but with an annual income in 1875 of only 5425 rupees, and 60 students, the school could ill afford them.¹³⁵ Neither could it afford any loss of support due to theological disputes. Strong opposition towards Aligarh came from the same forces who opposed the Sayyid's *'ilm al-Kalam*, the *ulama* and other conservatives. Their views on the institution and its runnings were invited, just as were those of the central and provincial governments.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p. 55.

The Raj approved of it, and with the help of the prominent Indian Civil Service member Sir John Strachey, reluctantly donated the land necessary for construction. The *ulama* were not in favour of the idea. They feared *Sunnis* mixing with *Shias*, and the British, and wearing English clothes, and they feared impressionable youths becoming indoctrinated by the man many deemed an infidel. Those who supported his efforts they condemned as heretics and otherwise pressured as part of a campaign to crush the Sayyid with *fatwas*. One asked *moulvis*, "Would they approve of establishing a college, whose founder did not believe in the physical ascension of the Prophet to heaven, disbelieved the account of Adam and Eve, and encouraged Muslims to imitate the manners and behavior of the Englishmen?"¹³⁶

The Sayyid chose wisely to exclude himself and his beliefs away from the religious studies at Aligarh, even though the decision seriously compromised his program for social reform, in which the practice and rationalization of faith played yin to the *yang* of modern education. According to Baljon, his educational work was a direct extension of his religious reforms.¹³⁷ Thus was a compromise made so that the College could continue without unnecessary bickering which would affect the learning process. Commenting on this situation, Tusuf Ali writes, "Religious instructors were appointed to teach on the old lines which did not really appeal to the students but which appealed to their parents and to the community generally...To this day (ie: 1941) the

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p. 49.

¹³⁶ *ibid*, p. 42.

¹³⁷ Baljon, p. 122.

nature of religious instruction remains undefined."¹³⁸ It was decided by College administrators that *Sunni* and *Shia* religious education at the college would be separated and controlled by a committee of *ulama* made up of seven members per sect, although it was difficult to achieve consensus on who the seven members would be. Each group had the power to "remove or co-opt" any member they wished, and to choose the syllabus, the instructors, and the method of instruction. To appease one of his more vocal opponents, Ali Bakhsh Khan, the Sayyid gave his word of honour that he would remain silent as far as the teaching of Islam at the College was concerned, and he did so. Due to its controversial content, copies of the *Tahbib-ul-Akhlaq* were banned from the school's premises, and the Sayyid "scrupulously avoided" discussing religion with both students and staff. The College was intended for the glory of Islam, and from this perspective Sayyid Ahmad Khan felt justified in writing angry rebuttals to those who were doing harm to the religion by opposing Aligarh and its aims. In his opinion they were "demolishing a mosque simply because an unclean and sinful man sat in it."¹³⁹

In the college in Aligarh, which became a university in 1920, all of the Sayyid's requirements for a Muslim renaissance came together under one roof. MAO provided its students with an atmosphere that was undeniably Muslim, yet cosmopolitan in its staff, students and subjects. Living and praying together, *Sunnis* and *Shias* experienced first hand the brotherhood demanded by their faith, but which he thought was denied by dogma. Excluding no one, the college allowed Hindus and Christians to share in the

¹³⁸ Yusuf Ali, Modern India and the West (Cambridge: University Press, 1941), p. 401-402.

¹³⁹ David Lelyveld, Aligarh's First Generation Muslim solidarity in British India (Princeton: University Press, 1978), p. 132.

educational experience to realize that all did so on an equal basis, therefore contributing to a healthy community and country where unity was built on toleration and diversity. Always a reformer but never a revolutionary, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his followers managed to assert Indian identity through the concept of self-help and self-direction while supporting the Government and its interests. Speaking at a *madrassah* in Gurdaspur, Punjab, in January 1884, he said, "I am of the opinion that no government can take the responsibilities of the education of the whole nation, and I firmly believe that it is not possible for the government to mete out fully the educational requirements of its subjects... Indians will progress only when they themselves, without the interference of the government and its officers, arrange for the education of their young boys out of their voluntary contribution, and themselves administer and control it."¹⁴⁰

Yet, MAO would only be a house and never a home for the Sayyid's beliefs and visions. It is ironic that the Islam he practiced, one which encouraged and even necessitated the creation of an institution such as Aligarh, would never be taught within its very walls. The irony thickens when one considers the fate of the Oriental Department, which was intended to revive Muslim culture. Its failure was already evident from 1877, when only 18 students registered in the Arabic and Persian sections. Persian studies disappeared in 1881, but the Arabic department lasted until 1885, when absurdly there were two teachers but only one student. By November of the same year, the department ceased to exist altogether.¹⁴¹ Like the Pakistan of Mohammed Ali Jinnah,

¹⁴⁰ Shan Mohammad, Writings and Speeches of, p. 172.

¹⁴¹ Bhatnagar, History of, p. 62.

MAO would become something quite different from the expectations of its founder. It would produce educators, journalists, scientists and scores of civil servants, but eventually for two states and not just one, as many of its graduates would go on to secure jobs in Pakistan, born in 1947. The Sayyid would have lamented the occasion. The division was contrary to his belief that Hindus and Muslims could live together, and that British rule was both permanent and in essence beneficial for India. Furthermore it revealed the danger of agitational politics, which the Sayyid had spoken out against on numerous occasions, both before and after the advent of the Indian National Congress Party in 1885.

Congress resolutions at the time included calls for the elective representation of Indians in the Provincial Legislative Councils, competitive examinations for the Indian Civil Service, and the creation of an ad hoc commission to revamp the political system of the country. The party, whose members were drawn from a variety of backgrounds, wanted to gain legitimacy in London and Calcutta by claiming to represent the aspirations of all Indians. It was hoped that this strong and national political organization would help to unite "the scattered and fragmented elements in Indian society..."¹⁴² Thus, it was vital for Congress to maintain a neutral posture if its programmes were to succeed. In 1887 and 1888 the Congress "decided not to discuss any subject which either Hindus or Muslims 'unanimously or nearly unanimously' opposed."¹⁴³ In the opinion of Madras Congress members (1887) the party was a success and "bore every appearance of

¹⁴² Mushirul Hasan, Nationalism and Communal Politics in India (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 1991). p. 21.

¹⁴³ *ibid*, p. 22.

becoming a national institution."¹⁴⁴

In practice however, many Congressmen, if not the Congress Party itself, closely identified with Hindu traditions and revivalist movements such as the Prayag Hindu Samaj. The Cow Protection Movement in the Punjab was orchestrated mostly by Congress officials. In Uttar Pradesh, prominent members of the party, supported by wealthy landowners, bankers and merchants, called for a ban on cow slaughter. They also initiated a campaign for the recognition of *Devengari* as the official script of government offices and courts.¹⁴⁵ "The consequences of their activities... was to strengthen a specifically Hindu rather than all-Indian identity. In the late nineteenth century, it was unclear which of the competing identities would become paramount."¹⁴⁶

Muslims consequently viewed the Congress and its ideas in diverse ways. In Bengal and Punjab the majority of educated Muslims were against competitive examinations for government service because they believed that they were not ready to compete as a community against more advanced Hindus. The argument, as expressed in Bengal by Abdul Latif and Amir Ali of the Mohommedan Literary Society and the Central National Mohommedan Association respectively, was that a competitive society would accentuate the differences between religious communities and favour Hindus. This same argument was used in northern India in support of nomination over election. In Uttar Pradesh, Muslims worried about being "swamped" nationally by a Hindu

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.23-24.

¹⁴⁶ John, R. McLane, Indian Nationalism and The Early Congress (Princeton: University Press, 1977). p. 16.

majority after some Muslim candidates failed to get elected during the 1890 municipal elections.¹⁴⁷

These arguments against Congress were shared by Sayyid Ahmad Khan. MAO was barely ten years old, and he felt much remained to be accomplished. With the theological and cultural components of his reform program either defunct or denied ingress to the College, and with his memories of the horrors of 1857 still sharp, the Sayyid wanted all Indians to avoid any political confrontation and to maintain the community's focus on education and cooperation with the British, not on politics. In 1887, he wrote,

There are people who hold the opinion that our national cause will be promoted (in the best way) by discussing political affairs. I do not agree with that, but regard the spread of education to be the only means for the promotion of the national cause. In these days our nation should not strive for anything other than the spread of education. When in our country education will be sufficiently propagated then we shall have sufficient means to arise from our backward condition.¹⁴⁸

When it came to the idea and goal of a "one man -one vote" democracy for India, he pointed to the population disparity between Hindus and Muslims and asked, "How will the Mohammanan guard his interests?"¹⁴⁹ Besides fearing majorities, the man who believed in the divine right of kings could not accept the idea of public elections because "the Viceroy cannot address members of the lower classes as "my honourable

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 23-27.

¹⁴⁸ Baljon, *The Reforms and*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁹ Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 37.

colleagues", nor can he invite them to grand dinners".¹⁵⁰ The Sayyid was one of the leading Indians to criticize the Raj for excluding Indians from legislative bodies, but he thought that the idea of a representative type of government was pre-mature and perhaps unsuited for India. This was a view held by many other Muslims and Hindus.¹⁵¹ He wondered if the nation was too diverse in terms of religion, social customs, race, caste, and economy for an electoral democracy to function. He looked at the experience of other countries and decided that a replication of Ireland, its troubles and its separatist politics, was not needed in Hindustan. Where there was such a great majority, the Sayyid felt that "the larger community would totally override the interests of the smaller community," and this would ensure that "violence would prevail and peace in the country [would] be no more."¹⁵² This was the same view he had presented in 1833 in support of the Local Self Government Act for Central Provinces. Sayyid Ahmad said majorities would always dictate the rights of minorities, "where caste distinctions flourish, where there is no fusion of the various races, where religious distinctions are still violent, where education in the modern sense has not made an equal or proportionate progress among the population."¹⁵³

This opinion disturbed Congress members who wished to have a man of the Sayyid's stature on their side. Since MAO had opened its doors, he had become a

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 37.

¹⁵¹ For example, Surendrenath Banerjea, leader of the Indian Association, and Romesh Chunder Dutt, a prominent Congress ideologue, both denied popular representation on the grounds that the masses were too illiterate to speak for themselves. See Farzana Shaikh, p. 88-89.

¹⁵² Shan Mohammed, Writings and Speeches of, p. 280.

national figure, a knighted member of the Imperial Legislative Council to whom the rulers of the Raj gave their collective ear. Could he not give Congress his voice? He could, but only in the name of dissension. Responding to requests in 1887 from Congress President, Badruddin Tyabji, to join in the political struggle, he wrote, "I do not understand what the words 'National Congress' mean... You regard the doings of the misnamed National Congress as beneficial to India, but I am sorry to say that I regard them as injurious not only to my community but also to India at large."¹⁵⁴ Supported in his opinion by many Hindu *talukdars* and *rajahs*, particularly the Maharaja of Benares, Sayyid Ahmad Khan formed the United Indian Patriotic Association in 1888 which denounced the Congress as a disloyal body. Yet, many Muslims disagreed with the Sayyid. Between 1885 to 1901, 596 out of 1620 Congress delegates in Uttar Pradesh were Muslim, most of them from either Lucknow or Allahabad. They were teachers, bankers merchants and lawyers and were often connected to secular organizations such as the Anjuman-i Muhammadi or Rifah-i Am.¹⁵⁵ Others were inspired to support Congress in light of a widely publicized *fatwa*, titled *Nusrat-al Abraar*, signed by more than 100 *ulama* in Deoband who supported Congress and opposed the Patriotic Association.¹⁵⁶ Even some of Aligarh's first students sacrificed the policy of loyalty to the Raj in favour of something perhaps greater. Graduate Syed Rafique observed, "The prospect of a united India does seem at first utopian and impracticable. But it is an object worth striving

¹⁵³ Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First*, p. 311.

¹⁵⁴ Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁶ For information on the "Deoband School" and its objectives, see Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, p. 22-67.

for."¹⁵⁷ Producing six volumes of Qur'anic commentary from 1880 to 1895, and ten other religious works and treatise during the same period, Sayyid Ahmad Khan died in Aligarh on March 27, 1898.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁸ Baljon, p. 131-132.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The aim of this work has been to examine the ideas and career of Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a theological and social reformer. In the first chapter a short biography was provided along with a statement of the problem and how the controversy about his work has been addressed or illuminated by others. Chapter II established the historical context to which he reacted, focusing on his loyalist role in the Mutiny of 1857, and the subsequent writings he produced on the 1857 rebellion, namely *Tarikh Sarkashiy-i Dhillah Bijnor* (History of the revolt in the District of Bijnor) and *Asab-i Baghawat-i Hind* (The Causes for India's Revolt). Finally, the third chapter discussed the Sayyid's four methods for accomplishing a community revival. This included four components: First, the acceptance of a purified Muslim theology, the refinement of ethics and manners, the absolute necessity of a modern education, and continuance of loyalty to the British regime.

Revealed in the evidence presented are the strenuous efforts of an individual who may have been guilty of epitomizing the expression "charity begins at home", but who certainly was not guilty of the charge of dismantling that very dwelling. The Sayyid's experience in 1857 demonstrated several things. In his mind the British loomed as an

ominous and respectable force which was likely permanent and beneficial to all Indians. If peace and prosperity could be accomplished throughout the land, what difference did it make, he asked, if it was achieved by a European or an Indian, a Christian or a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh? This was shrewd practicality but he argued that it was also something much greater - it was a requirement of his religion. Commenting on his own progress as an individual, he wrote, "When my mind developed from the level of an animal, it could have developed in no other direction but the religious one and it could not have modeled itself but on that which was common and which all men believed in."¹⁵⁹ The proclamation of universal belief may be naive or insupportable, but it reveals the notion that it was not so much what one believes that was important, but belief itself. It therefore followed that different beliefs should serve not to divide but to unite.

Solid and profound commitment to Islam motivated Sayyid Ahmad Khan into action, with the hope of improving the lives of his fellow Muslims in particular and his fellow countrymen in general. In any endeavour he undertook, people of other faiths could not help but benefit from the results. His courage displayed during the Mutiny saved many from a ghastly fate. His subsequent writings on that event helped to ease tensions that existed between Muslims and the Raj, and notified the Government of its own failings in dealing with its subjects. His efforts to educate the public, either Muslim or Hindu achieved no less (even though they were compromised to appease opponents). In his writings in the *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* on social evils and outdated customs we find the desire to strengthen his community, to make it able to recognize and address the

¹⁵⁹ C.W. Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan-A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), p.

challenges of change rather than ignore them. This was also paramount in his *ilm al-kalam*. Aligning Islam with reason, using a liberal application of *ijtihad*, and cleansing the *hadiths* forced Muslims to examine critically what their faith really entailed and whether or not they were living up to it. In fact, this direction held important implications for the *ummah* at large, and not just for sub-continent Muslims, because it offered the possibility to break down sectarian differences according to Qur'anic injunctions. It was hoped by the Sayyid that if Muslims could eliminate their own biases and bigotry everyone would be better off as a result. However, some have argued that in his desire to eliminate supernatural concepts from Islam he failed to supply people with a "spiritual substitute". In a sense, "Ahmad Khan's religion was too much stripped of the *sensus numinus* (sense of a transcendental world) to find acceptance."¹⁶⁰

In the end, disappointment would abound for the Sayyid. He lamented the conservatism which still seemed to thrive amongst the Muslims, and the rejection by many of them of anything new whether it concerned science or theology. But he was not willing to withdraw into a more contemplative life. Writing to his friend Nawab Viqer-ul-Mulk, he said "it is not necessary to give up one's strenuous efforts even if its ultimate result seems to be apparently unsatisfactory."¹⁶¹ This is why he was cautious when it came to political activity. It was considered as being premature; seeing that the community was still not focused he saw little reason to increase their depth of field to include politics. Politics was a peripheral activity for the Sayyid. Education was still

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¹⁶⁰ Baljon, p. 130.

¹⁶¹ Shan Mohammed, Writings and Speeches of Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1972), p.

(and always was) his priority because Muslims still lagged behind their Hindu brethren.

Explaining his opinion to a Hindu audience while speaking amidst the Congress

controversy, he said,

The Hindus of the country though better placed than us should realize that their condition is not as good as they believe it to be and that they should not run ahead leaving us neglected far behind. We are all inhabitants of the same country... The fate we will meet will also be shared by the rest of the country.¹⁶²

Thus, in his thought, the destiny of one was to be the destiny of all. From this context it becomes difficult to accept the idea that Sayyid Ahmad Khan was working with the intent to separate Muslims from Hindus. This would have amounted to the complete denial of his life's work and have left him as a sinner before his god. The Sayyid's efforts to alleviate the suffering and ignorance of those around him, was crucial to the development of the Muslim Renaissance in India. He reacted to the modern age with remarkable swiftness and managed to create a comprehensive response to it that was progressive and pragmatic, yet traditional in its dependence on prophetic virtue. He did not separate the development of knowledge from the development of faith – each, in a sense, was a prerequisite or “duty” of the other. If I may say so, he presents Islam with the utmost dignity and clarity that it deserves; as a universal faith committed to the welfare of humanity and submission to God.

It is hoped that future research might concentrate on other questions such as the relevance of his theology for Muslims in the present and his contribution to religious

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¹⁶² *ibid*, p. 10.

pluralism. His message of self-help is as relevant to Muslims now as it was then. The toleration and appreciation for diversity he demonstrated yesterday should not be lost in the shrinking world of today.

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* All Urdu sources used in this thesis were English translations.

 APPENDIX I

Muslim Graduates From Government Schools and Colleges¹⁶³

Name of the University Degree	Total Number of Graduates	Number of Muhammdan Graduates	Remarks
Doctors in Law	6	*	
Honours in Law	4	*	
Bachelors in Law	705	8	None from the N.W. Provinces.
Licentiates in Law	235	5	None from the N.W. Provinces.
Bachelors in Civil Engineering	36	*	
Licentiates in Civil Engineering	51	*	
Masters of Arts	326	5	No Muhammadan has passed either in English or Science.
Bachelors of Arts	1343	30	
Doctors in Medicines	4	*	
Honours in Medicines	2	*	
Bachelors in Medicines	58	1	None from the N.W. Provinces.
Licentiates in Medicine and Surgery	385	8	None from the N.W. Provinces.
Total	3,155	57	

¹⁶³ Statistics gathered by Sayyid Ahmad Khan between 1858-1878 as cited in Shan Mohammad, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan- A Political Biography (Meerut: Prakash, 1969), p. 56.

VITA

Surname: Maclure

Given Names: Grant Edward

Place of Birth: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria

1988 to 1993

Sheridan College

1984 to 1985

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. University of Victoria

1993

Honours and Awards:

Ian H. Stewart Fellowship

1996

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Author



Grant Edward Maclure
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