



Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Multifarious Activities in England

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Abstract

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the British Empire surpassed all the earlier empires in territorial size, during this time period British Empire earned the illustrious title 'the Empire which never sees a sunset'. From 1858 to 1947, known as the British Crown Raj, the entire territory encompassing India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh was under the direct rule of Britain by the Parliament working on behalf of the British Crown. During this era, a substantial number of Indians - largely professionals - went to Britain. Indian students won scholarships for pursuing higher education and vital professional qualification in the UK, subsequently entering into the established system of colonial hierarchy upon their return to India. Political activists being qualified stayed on to practice their professions in England. Businessmen went to seek economic opportunities. In such an environment, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan decided to visit Britain. As a philosopher, activist, historiographer, thinker and educationist, he was interested in exploring and observing Britain and its culture. He was the first Muslim who intended to visit Britain just to boost up the Muslim community and indeed, his visit made history. The purpose of this article is to narrate Syed Ahmad's social, political and literary engagements during his stay in England.

Keywords: Sir Syed, Tour, England, Technology, Institutions, Libraries, Meetings.

Introduction

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) had an emotional attachment with the British nation as ruler of India. He opposed the mutiny

and helped the British people for saving their lives during riots in Bijnour where he was posted as Sadr Amin, because he conceived that the British regime would last longer. It was Sir Syed's shrewd sense to develop a compromised understanding with the British which was the only mode for the survival of Indians especially for Muslims and he firmly believed that no English rule could succeed in securing the progress of the Indian nation.¹ He acclaimed the British rule in India as the greatest remarkable spectacle in the world.² He was contented with British rule because Britishers got prestige as rulers, not invaders and he explicitly said that the Britain had married to a widow i.e. India. On another occasion, he said 'Thank God we have become under Queen Victoria'.³ He went on the extreme level when he said '*If I become a Viceroythen I assure that as a Viceroy I would strengthen the government of respected Queen*'.⁴ The reason behind such sentiments highlights that he was very much impressed by the English civilization and culture. He did make a contrast between Indians and Britishers and commented as the native of India, regardless of their social position, blatantly contrast with the English in terms of education, style and decency.⁵ Sir Syed had adopted British culture even before going to England, such as he began to wear Western suits and began to live in a bungalow situated at a distance from the population and usage of tables and chairs. The Muslims considered the English as usurpers of India and destroyers of the Muslim Empire. Thus, they hated them, completely out of touch with reality. Sir Syed, alone amongst the Muslims of the day was realistic enough to realize the gravity of the situation, particularly after 1857. He had the wish that the differences between rulers and subjects should be demolished and Indians should run parallel for social, educational and cultural progress and for this purpose, he addressed his rulers stating that for living together for over a century the rulers and the ruled sharing same land, water and air, could not develop the social interaction and friendship.⁶ Sir Syed evolved a theory of cultural diffusion, which justified within an Islamic frame of reference the acceptance of modern science and national progress. It appears that Sir Syed was far too ahead of his age, therefore, in the Scientific Society's magazine of February 1869, he had to say that the formation of a strong association between Indians and the British

would secure a bright future for India. He urged the people to visit Britain for a better understanding of the culture of the West. He was convinced will do a world of good to visiting Indians who can ultimately enrich India with their splendid experience. In quest of this intimate desire, I would like to visit the West in general and England in particular setting a precedence for others –many a young Indians to follow –for after all travel is also an important mode for learning and acquiring knowledge. In fact, he wanted to create a new identity for the people by upgrading their sense of political and cultural understanding. He believed in awaking world, rather than dreams, that is why he wanted the Muslims of sub-continent to turn their back on the past and look to the future. So with the end of this view he decided to go to England.

*‘The Travel Journal is an embellished narrative of the experiences and observations of a man with an inquisitive and receptive mind, eager to learn and understand It is also forthright expression of the thoughts and feeling of a man whose ruling passion was to make his people march abreast of the times, both morally and physically. Syed Ahmad looked at every thing with a student’s fresh eyes, had a dedicated teacher’s mind, covering everything learnt into a lesson to be imparted’.*⁷

Social, Political and Literary Engagements

Syed Ahmad had been longing to visit England to collect source material to write on various perspectives of the life of Muhammad (PBUH), the Prophet of Islam. In this regard, Sir William Muir’s work was important for him. His work in four volumes was published in 1861 under the title of ‘The Life of Muhammad, containing numerous misrepresentations based on unreliable Arabic sources to undermine the faith of the upcoming western and English educated youth. Sir Syed felt deeply hurt in conscience and resolved to write an authentic biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) refuting the strongly biased and incorrect views of Sir William Muir. And for this purpose books were available in British Museum or India Office London. And secondly, he had intention of visiting England and studying for himself the sources of England power. By luck Sir Syed became able to go England because his younger son, Syed Mahmud, had

won a government scholarship for study in Cambridge University England –he was the first Indian from the North Western Provinces to win this award. Sir Syed seized the opportunity and decided to accompany him. So, at the age of fifty-two, when most persons in India feel that they are entitled to a well-earned rest, he left his country on his long and expensive voyage because he was genuinely convinced that his visit to Britain was necessary for gaining first-hand knowledge about the characteristics of English life. Although it was a challenging task especially for a government employee but he allowed no obstacles to stand in his way. Financially, however, Sir Syed was in a squeeze. For his European travel, he had not only mortgaged his ancestral house in Delhi, but had also borrowed ten thousand rupees with interest.⁸ It was his first and last visit to England which was multipurpose. In his application for leave, Sir Syed explained that he wanted to see the commerce, factories and hospitals of Britain.⁹ Another aspect of this visit has been explained by Hali that “it was a pretence to look after his son, intentionally he wanted the favour of Islam”.¹⁰ Fifteen years later he announced the major resolution of his travel was to gain awareness about the English education system. ¹¹ Sir Syed left Bombay on the 10th April 1869 and arrived in England on the 4th May 1869. He took along with him his eldest son, Syed Hamid, younger son, Syed Mahmud, his secretary Mirza Khudadad Beg and his personal servant Chajju. In India, Sir Syed’s loyalty to the British government can be seen as a traditional phenomenon. During his visit to Britain, he identified the extreme power and abundant resources of Britain, strengthening his belief that the appropriate way to behave with rulers was to remain faithful. His observations strengthened his belief that the British had the power to protect India as per the promise. His visit to Aden, a British cantonment, offered him a strong sense of British power. Accordingly, he informed his countrymen that the British had control over all the Sentries along the roads to India, and they held a crucial role along the route of the Red Sea as well. He was highly overwhelmed by European civilization and its progress.¹² When he landed at London first of all he reached Charing Cross Hotel with the help of a travel agent, where he stayed four days. He had no sufficient money to arrange a new and furnished house, so he was compelled to the low-rent

house at 21 Mecklenburg Square and occupied a portion of the house in which the 'landlord' provided food, beds and servants. For availing of such facilities, the bill was paid weekly.¹³ There he lived satisfactorily till his return. Although he lived in the middle-class neighborhoods, his association was mostly with the members of the British nobility and upper bourgeoisie. As a representative from the North Indian Muslim community, he was warmly welcomed in England. In fact, he was serving in a responsible position both in England and India. Tufail Ahmad Manglori reports that he won the confidence of the British Government as one of the most loyal subjects. Thus, the Muslims considered him their benefactor and friend and he was an enthusiastic patriot for Hindus considered him a.¹⁴ He was the first Indian subordinate official who believed in fellowship and friendly relations with his English officials, rather than crawling to them in subservience. He induced trust in his officials and they, in turn, trusted him. Accordingly, he was able to secure leave without pay, but when he faced financial issues in London, problems, he filed a petition for relief to the relevant authorities in India stating that he had sold and mortgaged his property in India before moving to England; however, the raised money would not suffice for him to pay inevitably expenses of daily life leading him to go back to India as an indebted and penniless person.¹⁵ By the year 1869, when he decided to visit England, he had done over 31 years of service, working together with the British officers at close quarters, so the petition was favourably considered and the Secretary of State for India granted leave with him full pay during his stay. Some of the English officers who had seen or heard of Syed Ahmad Khan's services during the 'Mutiny' proved of immense help to him during his stay in England. He had seen at first hand the marvels of sciences, technology and miracles, which caused industrial revolution and economic prosperity in England. Sir Syed, while staying in England, was keen to observe, learn, and probe all the facets of English life. He remained in England for the seventeenth months and kept a very busy routine having numerous social and political engagements. He had ample opportunity for six months in the summer to tour most of England, Wales and Scotland. Some old stalwarts of the Indian Empire, including General Sir Abraham Roberts, Sir Edward Strachey and John Elliot Bitton invited him to

Bristol and Clifton, and showed him the landmarks of the city.¹⁶ He visited Bristol and Clifton—two cities of England one hundred and eighteen kilometers far away from London situated on hills famous for their pleasant climate. In Clifton, he saw a hanging bridge over the Avon, made of iron. He thought that ‘this bridge is neither a castle for king nor a palace for rich man but just for public welfare’. By observing that bridge Sir Syed acknowledged the greatness of the British nation and praised the civic sense and technical ability of the British bourgeoisie. At every place when he noticed a development, he made a comparison between Indians and Britishers. After seeing bridge, in his travelogue he described the history of the construction of the bridge prevailing from 1753 to 1864. Here he asked a rhetorical question: “Are these (Britons) the human beings or us— who are drowned in selfishness?”. Next thing he saw in Clifton was an observatory where a woman was an organizer who showed different instruments and explained their functions. He became astonished that a woman was dealing with such a factory.¹⁷ Near Clifton he saw a large house of a famous merchant Sir William millionaire. The area of that house was approximately twenty kilometer and the characteristic of that house was that besides residential building, it had forest, hunting ground, garden, library, art gallery, musical instruments and games arena. The aesthetic sense of the owner impressed him. While in Bristol the sight of harbour where steamer and marine ship loaded with commercial luggage for American market fascinated Sir Syed.¹⁸ Then he showed great interest in the printing industry as he himself, had a press at home in India. To him, the printing press was the most useful scientific tool of his day; it was the up and coming media and subserved an enormous human need in any situation at any time, namely information.

During his stay in England, he was able to get ‘Athenaeum Club’ membership. This ‘Athenaeum Club’ was a literary society of London. Edward Thomas, a judge of Delhi along with it a historian and writer who was a member of Club’s management, selected Sir Syed as honorary member. According to Sir Syed ‘this Club is famous than any other club of London, anyone who nominates its member receives congratulation letters from his friends and he feels much more pride even than gaining a title and the criteria of

the membership of this Club is very strict, only those persons who wrote any book or expert of any art can become the member'.¹⁹ The environment of this Club was research oriented where to keep pin drop silence was necessary. Here an old man named Stanley was busy in a research whom Sir Syed observed silently and praised Almighty Allaha that 'such people are living in this world'.

He visited the vast libraries in London and other cities and saw the historical archives they contained as well as original manuscripts. He compared India Office to 'city of books' and British Museum to 'jungle of books'. In British Museum, he noticed that many cabins were fixed just for lists of books.²⁰ Here an incident happened one day Sir Syed and his sons came to India's Office where they saw a book depicting all the Indian races in pictures and letterpress to highlight the behaviors, manners and traditions of all the races. He felt that the photographs and pictures depicting all these facets were taken on the spot. They felt regret because pictures showed how Indians were savage. While Syed Mahmud was studying the book, a young Englishman, came to him and asked whether he was a Hindustani or not. Mahmud responded in the positive, but tried to explain that, 'I am of a foreign nation and not an Indian'. Here Sir Syed's remarks were that Hindustanis must try to eliminate this blot so that they should be granted respect by all the civilized races. The Guildhall in London, over 700-800 years the seat of local government, had and still has an enormous reference library where the history of London and of England is documented. At this juncture, he felt sad and depressed, as the libraries during the Muslim rule in India were totally destroyed by the insurgents in the skirmishes of 1857, and he recalled that the great Mongol invasion in 1258 did the same havoc to over 200-300 libraries at Baghdad, the then centre of the Muslim world and focus of civilization. The same happened to the famous Muslim libraries in the Spanish towns of Granada and Cordova after the reconquest of Spain in the thirteenth century. Public libraries were an innovation in the Victoria era, they had just been introduced in the towns in the year 1854.²¹ A hobby of Sir Syed was that he arranged a photo album of Britain's kings and making photographs of houses having different designs to show his Indian friends.

Sir Syed's activities before moving to England depict that he was aware of the importance of education for society and his stay in England increased this sense as he could visit many leading educational institutes in Britain. He not only visited the historical and prestigious universities of Cambridge and Oxford but also went to observe the structure, system and working patterns of elite schools like Harrow and Eton.²² As he was observing all this as an educator, he made detailed notes about the organization, accommodation, conventions, traditions, teaching methodologies, syllabus, arrangements of classes, and the structure of buildings of all these institutions. He exchanged his ideas on educational problems with teachers, educators, professors and administrators to identify what was unique in these institutes. Sir Syed wrote to Mahdi Ali that you would be amazed to note the way education is imparted in England.²³ He requested the lists of recommended books for all types of students and classes. He also realized that the choice of books and curriculum was not the sole factor of a highly engaging English education system; rather other elements such as skilled professors and teachers, the discipline of institutes, standard boarding life, involvement in extracurricular activities, and experiences at these institutes, the combination of all these factors, in fact, involved in shaping the general character of students. Sir Syed recognized that these institutions worked amazingly to produce thousands of civil servants who governed the huge number of twenty-six million people in India. All this instilled in Sir Syed an unwavering belief the potential of private institutions would be of much use for India to compete with English institutions and their significant impact on the improvement of the political and social life of English people. Commenting on the achievements of Europe, he wrote to Nawab Mahdi Ali that it is astonishing to see these achievements made independently, without any significant provision from the government. This establishes that a significant number of individuals dedicated to learning new skills and attaining modern education would accomplish a great deal if only such sort of institutes are established in India without support from the government.²⁴ The Cambridge university left a permanent imprint on his mind, and he aimed the foundation of a Muslim Cambridge in his own country. In 1870, the foundations of the M.A.O College were laid in London. British Engineers helped

him and his son, Mahmud, to sketch the plan in England.²⁵ There was hardly a night in England when both failed to discuss their schemes and projects about this College.²⁶ Furthermore, for the brainstorming of his coreligionist, he planned to launch an Urdu magazine, '*Tahzibul-Akhlaq*' and in English 'Muhammadan Social Reformer'. The base of this magazine was two famous British journals 'Spectator' and 'Tattler' of Addison and Steele respectively. The blueprint of this magazine was prepared in England. For suggested journal he purchased stock of stationery from England and sent them to India via marine ship.²⁷ In this concern, Syed Mahmud was the chief supporter, to whom Sir Syed admitted that 'If Syed Mahmud had not been with me then my visit of London would be futile'.

After observing the British educational system, Sir Syed wrote a critique of Indian system of education with the title '*Stricture upon the present Educational System in India*'. This pamphlet was written in English in which he pointed out the deficiencies in the Indian education system. He criticized the government's unjust imposition on the Indian student to study Western science and English literature, which resulted in the loss of the Indian students' natural gifts including their mother tongue and cultural heritage. Also, the government compelled them to compete with English students at the age of twenty, while English was a foreign language. As a result, Indian students' perception could not compete with English counterparts, which was the result of unjust British government's unjust actions in India. If the students from Indian communities appeared backwards, it was the fault of the British government in India. He argued that the government was responsible for the establishment of an education system that would empower the youth of India to obtain sufficient knowledge by the age of twenty, which would enable them to compete on equal footing with English candidates in Civil Service.²⁸

During his stay in England, he created close connections with significant personalities. He reported this in a letter that he had been invited by more than thirty Lords and Knights.²⁹ Such events turned his visit to England into a pleasant experience as numerous people like Lord Lawrence the former Governor General of India, visited him 'once every month during his stay' and frequently invited him for dinners. Lord Lawrence knew Sir Syed's family

well and was very kind to him. He made arrangements for Sir Syed's visits to important institutions. He also met Lord Stanley of Alderly, who because of his long stay in Turkey as Britain's ambassador had acquired a respectable knowledge of Islamic laws and history. Lord Stanley was glad to see a leading Indian Muslim in London. Mr. Kaye was Sir Syed's frequent companion. He was then composing his great history of the Mutiny. They discussed various complicated problems connected with India. He sought Sir Syed's views about 'the Mutiny of 1857' which grew into a widespread revolt. Sir Syed strived to convince him that it was never so and furnished arguments that were already published in his '*Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind*' (*Causes of the Indian Revolt*). He also met with Haji Muhammad Husain, ambassador of Iran. They discussed religious issues. Syed Ahmad's old friend and biographer, Col. Graham, who was on vacation in Britain, often visited him and once even lured him to the horse races at Derby. He had the honor to attend the event in which Charles Dickens read for the last time in his life. Among the celebrities whom he met was Thomas Carlyle. He spoke with him about '*Heroes and Hero-worship*' and the focus of their discussion was the life of Muhammad (PBUH) as Carlyle extremely appreciated that work. Both also discussed Sir Syed's '*Essays on the life of Muhammad (PBUH)*'.³⁰ He also came to know John Davenport, who had written '*An Apology for Muhammad and the Quran*'. Sir Syed had met John Davenport soon after his arrival in London and had become interested in him as an earnest and sympathetic student of Islam. As no English publisher was willing to publish his book, Sir Syed had the book published at his own expenses and got it translated into Urdu.³¹ He expressed the highest admiration for the author, who was not a Muslim but an Englishman, and yet had been able to achieve something which even Muslims might very well envy.

He was granted the honour of being made a Companion of the Star of India. Sir William Muir's generally known anti-Islamic bias, he privately maintained a generous and appreciative attitude toward Sir Syed. In the summer of 1869, Sir Syed was possibly

uninformed about Sir William initiative of sponsoring Sir Syed for the award of the third class¹ Order of the Star of India.³²

Accordingly, Sir John Lawrence, Governor-General of India, sent a letter to the Duke of Argyll on July 9, 1867, praising Syed Ahmad for his progressive and inclusive views. Lawrence highlighted his energies for promoting liberal and enlightened thoughts in the Indian communities, particularly signifying his positive efforts during the crisis of the mutiny in 1857.³³

On 4 June 1869, Lord Lawrence sent a letter to Sir Syed informing that he had been pleased to inform him that Sir Syed had been nominated for Third Class of the Star of India and that it was recommended by him before he left India.³⁴ Sir Syed describes in his own words the ceremony of investiture that he went to the India office on 6 August 1869 to receive the insignia of the Companionship of the Star of India and was appreciated by Mr. Kaye, Secretary of State for India. After a short interval, Mr. Benthall, private secretary to his Grace shook hands with me and led me adjoining room, where the Duke-His Grace- presented me with the Star, together with the royal warrant bearing the signature of the Queen, appointing me a “Companion of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India”.³⁵ He felt pleasure to see his pamphlet ‘Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind’ on the table in the Council. He was told by Secretary of State for India that pamphlet was translated into English which was thoroughly discussed in Parliament and India Office, but all discussion was confidential which could not be published.

He also attended a dinner at Greenwich given by Smeatonian Society of Civil Engineers, on the 13th July 1869. This society was founded in 1771 by Smeaton for the professional engineers and scientists to enhance their science. It was a great honour to an Indian visitor. He made a speech in which he described works of engineering like railways, telegraph, canals and roads as the greatest contribution made to India by the British.³⁶ Before the

¹Sir John Lawrence had recommended for 1869 some 77 individuals (1 for Class I, 24 for Class II, and 52 for Class III) for the Order of the Star of India award, but the Secretary of State selected only 24 individuals (1 for Class I, 3 for Class II, and 20 for Class III). The Class I Star was awarded to the Rana of Dholepore, Class II to the Raja of Cochin and two British officials, and Class III to 17 Britons, one Parsee businessman, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, and other Muslims (whom history has forgotten), Mir Akbar Ali.

arrival in England, Sir Syed became the member of the ‘ Royal Asiatic Society’ of London due to his original research work-‘*Asar-us-Sanadid*’ which was partly an archaeological history and partly a biographical encyclopedia of contemporary personalities of the city Delhi with a list of 142 Hindu and 59 Muslim rulers who reigned from 1400 B.C to 1853 A.D. The book was first published in 1844. In 1854 Sir Syed brought out an improved second edition. In revising this work he was helped by Mr. Roberts, Collector and Magistrate of Shahjahanpur, who suggested the re-arrangement of much of the material. This book won him international fame. A French translation of the book by the leading orientalist, M. Garcin de Tassej was widely appreciated and procured for Sir Syed the honour of a fellowship of the ‘ Royal Asiatic Society’. He was the first Asiatic to be honoured as a member of the ‘Royal Asiatic Society’.³⁷ During his stay in England he attendant many meetings of this ‘Society’. To crown all, he was specially requested to attend the opening ceremony of Black Friars Bridge and Holborn Viaduct on November 6, 1869, where Queen Victoria, Empress of India, was herself the chief guest. He was also called to the Queen’s Levee on March 11, 1870 and according to the established custom, he knelt on his left knee and kissed Her Majesty’s hand. He was the only civilian invited to participate in the Levee of the Prince of Wales, a purely military affair, which was reserved just for the Army officers.³⁸ At these levees he witnessed a microcosm of the magnificent and might of the British Empire. He got inspiration from the famous personalities and also put impression upon Britishers by his capabilities.

Among these busy routine Sir Syed never ignored his main purpose of visit, namely, collecting material for a befitting reply to Muir’s ‘*Life of Muhammad*’. The detail of this task was told from stage to stage. On August 20, 1869 Sir Syed wrote. ‘*I am reading Williaum Muir’s book, it has burned my heart; his injustice and bigotry has cut my heart to pieces. I am determined to write a full length study in refutation even if its preparation (in London) turns me into a pauper and a beggar*’.³⁹ And in the letter dated, February 11, 1870 he wrote that, ‘I have even written the preface to my book, God be thanked for His favours’.⁴⁰ He spent the greater part of his working hours in libraries of India Office and British

Museum. Anyways Sir Syed had ordered books from France and Germany and had purchased some in England and discovered an able writer, John Davenport, to assist him. He announced that he was getting the book published in English and had postponed its publication in Urdu, as he had secured the services of an English writer the like of whom could not be found in India in the same rate of payment. Sir Syed had to point out that the early sources on which Sir William based his work were those by Wakedee. No doubt this was one of the earlier biographies of Muhammad (PBUH) along with the Ibn Hisham and Tabari. According to the Muslim opinion, Wakedee was the least authentic author.⁴¹ In the main, the insinuation were-

1. Divorce and polygamy
2. Toleration is unknown
3. The sword is the inevitable penalty for the denial of Islam
4. Slavery is allowed in Islam
5. Freedom of judgement in religion is crushed and annihilated
6. In short, what was the legacy of Muhammad (PBUH) To the world? Did he really contribute something to the world?

Sir Syed answered to all these questions and much more, was to write a detailed critical, but factual account of the life of Muhammad in several Essays. These were published in English and he secured the good offices of an English writer of the day, John Davenport. The title of this biography was "A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad (PBUH) and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto". He assured '*if this book of mine is completed, I shall think that my visit to London was equal to ten pilgrimages to Mecca in term of salvation. May God accept it*'. Thus after months of patient research, Sir Syed finally published in London his monumental work- twelve essays- *A Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammad* (Trubner & Co. 1870). He wrote twelve essays with the following captions:

1. Essay on the Question Whether Islam has been Beneficial or Injurious to Human Society in General, and to the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations.
2. Essay on the Muhammedan Theological Literature.
3. Essay on the Muhammedan Traditions.
4. Essay on the Historical Geography of Arabia.

5. Essay on the Manners and Customs of the Pre-Islamic Arabians.
6. Essay on the Various Religions of the Pre- Islamic Arabs.
7. Essay on the Holy Quran.
8. Essay on the History of the Holy Makkah, including an account of the distinguished part enacted in connection therewith by the Ancestors of Muhammad (PBUH).
9. Essay on Shakki-sadar and Meraj, that is, the Splitting (open) of the Chest of Muhammad (PBUH) and his Night Journey.
10. Essay on the Pedigree of Muhammad (PBUH).
11. Essay on the Prophecies respecting Muhammad (PBUH), as contained in both the Old and the New Testament.
12. Essay on the Birth and Childhood of Muhammad (PBUH).⁴²

The book was a bulky one and he had to spend nearly Rs. 4000 to see the result of his labour in print, he wrote to his friends in India to sell his library even his kitchen utensils to raise the money. Along with the donations of his friends of India, he borrowed 3,000 rupees in London. Hali says that Sir William Muir's only comment on Sir Syed's Essay was 'I was not criticising the religion of Sir Syed but was criticising the religion of the Muslim world as they understood it'. No wonder J.M.S Baljon, the famous orientalist, acclaims these essays of Sir Syed as 'the works of a genius'. His Essays on the Life of Muhammad (PBUH) were completed in late March 1870 and after that he wanted to start movement for Muslim education.⁴³

Another activity in England to be mentioned is writing letters to his Indian friends to keep touch with the circumstances of his motherland, to know the matters of his association the 'Scientific Society and to create awareness among Indians about the progress of modern world of Europe. He admitted by his heart the superiority of England when he said ' All good things, have been bestowed by the Almighty on Europe, and especially on England'. He maintained a diary of his experiences, observations, thoughts, sentiments and all about his activities in England. His letters published in Aligarh Institute Gazette, the most important organ of 'Scientific Society'.

What he had seen in England can be summarized by his letter which he wrote during his stay that; 'I have been in the society of lords and dukes at dinners and evening parties. I have also mixed a good deal in that middle class society to which I myself belong. I have also observed the habits and customs and way of living of high and low, and seen the workshops of great merchants, the shops of smaller ones, the method of their storing and selling, their wares, and the manner in which they treat their customers. Artisans and the common workingmen I have seen in numbers. I have visited famous and spacious mansions, museums, engineering works, shipbuilding establishments, gun-foundries, ocean-telegraph companies which connect continents, vessels of war – in one of which I walked for miles, the Great Eastern Steamship – have been present at the meetings of several societies and have dined at clubs and private houses'.⁴⁴ He recalled all these things in 1874 at the occasion of birthday of Queen Victoria which was celebrated in India and Sir Syed addressed in a missionary school of Gorakhpur where he narrated the biography of Queen and along with it mentioned the habits and manners of the English people – their cleanliness, their punctuality and their orderly mode of living, even penned his memories in a article '*London ke Tarikhi Halaat*' (Historical Circumstances of London). His biographer Hali remarked that 'he saw everything, he ignored the defects of western civilization and picked up its good features'. Eventually, Sir Syed issued the schedule of his return in the letter dated May 27, 1870 that ' My departure has been decided. I have got permission from Secretary of State...I would leave London on 28 August 1870. I would stay in Egypt for one week and would reach at Bombay 2 October 1870'.⁴⁵ Syed Ahmad arrived at his homeland on 2 October 1870 and resumed his duties of Native Judge at Benares.

Conclusion

During his stay, spanning almost one and a half years, in England, Sir Syed keenly observed the dire need for launching reforms in the Muslim community. His visit, in other words, served as an opportunity for exploration and observation of English society through the lens of an Indian Muslim. His first-hand experience encompassed various aspects such as English socio-cultural growth patterns, educational system – particularly the work pattern of the

prestigious universities such as Oxford and Cambridge— curriculum design, syllabus formation, the political system, economic development and industrial strengths of the political and military power of England. Western culture and civilization, along with many other interesting details highlighted the greatness of the English nation and the greatest military power in Europe were also the part of Sir Syed's close observations. Consequently, he concluded that the greatness of nations lies in the moral system of their people. Sir Syed believed that the English were the most educated and enlightened people of his time due to their intellectually thriving life and vibrant culture coupled with increasing interest in the advancement of science and technology. He was highly inspired by them and he saw them as a model for the reform and revival of the Muslim community in India. He identified that this task could be achieved by welding Muslims into a notion of a single nation through the creation of a national identity. This approach would enable them to identify themselves in new ways while having a new meaning of the political ideology of the West and the parliamentary practices of the English people. Sir Syed, research-minded, by his scholarly exposition, demolished completely the arguments of Sir William Muir and other obnoxious writers on Islam and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) point by point copiously citing original authentic sources and extensive quotations from Old and New Testaments and Christian authorities. Sir Syed proved beyond doubt that the sources on which Sir William Muir relied were weak and rejected. He was the first Muslim to have these Essays published in English for the English speaking world.

Sir Syed's journey to Britain came as a boon to the Indian Muslims. He was happy that his mission to England was fully accomplished. He enjoyed the impact of Western civilization at its zenith. All around him the cry was loud and clear— 'the future of the world belongs to science'. Whatever he saw and studied there largely added to his knowledge. His first-hand contact with western life made him more confirm in his conviction that India's salvation lay in discarding its medieval outlook and taking to new ideas and methods. He came back fully determined to launch a crusade against the social evils and infuse the spirit of the education of the masses on English patterns. He discovered that the

treasure of scientific inventions was hidden in the English language and his countrymen must have access to it to achieve perfection in different fields of life. His return from England was the beginning of his active role as an educationist, a social reformer and the father of Muslim Renaissance in India. The fruits of the rich experiences which he gathered from his visit, he passed on to his people. Sir Syed, it seems had left a good impression in England. Altaf Husain Hali refers to an article in *the Homeward Mail* of 26 September 1870 that some responsible Englishmen ensured that 'their opinion of Indians would have remained poor if they had not met Syed Ahmad Khan'.

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