

BOOK REVIEW

Political Profile of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan:

A Documentary Record

Edited by Hafeez Malik

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Islamic University, Islamabad, 1982.

Rs. 175.00/\$20.00.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's career signifies the emergence of new political trends in Muslim society after the traumatic setback of 1857. Not only as a litterateur par excellence and pacesetter in Urdu prose, but also as a social reformer and political leader, he stands out in the history of Muslim awakening during the 19th century British India. Dr. Hafeez Malik has focused his attention on Sir Syed's political achievement. Dr. Hafeez is an erudite scholar of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's political thought. In his *Moslem Nationalism in India and Pakistan* (Washington, 1963) he has placed Sir Syed among the foremost leaders of Muslim cultural nationalism. This short but perceptive analysis, in the overview of Muslim politics, highlights Sir Syed's religious and political ideas. His sustained interest in Sir Syed culminated in his critical study entitled *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan* (New York, 1981). The book under review appears to be the byproduct of his major work cited above. In fact, it encompasses the source material on the basis of which Dr. Malik has built his interpretative framework. The importance of the documents included in this book is twofold. For the first time, these documents which lay dispersed in various reference libraries have been brought together in one cover. So far most of the writers, except for very few, have built their accounts on Hali, and Graham. In several cases, even the files of *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and *Tahzibul-Akhlaq* have not been consulted. This has resulted in the creation of a stereotype of Sir Ahmad who appears as an instrument of benign providence in a moment of Muslim distress. The second merit of this book lies in the fact, that *Tarikh Sarkashi-i-Zil'a-i-Bijnor* (History of the Revolt in Bijnor District) has been made available to the English reader. The translation is a joint effort of Dr. Malik and Mr. Morris Dembo. They compared different copies of the text and selected the one edited by Sharafat Husain Mirza and published by Nadwat-ul Musannifin, Delhi. Working independently on their drafts of English translations they evolved the final draft after mutual discussions. The art of translation is difficult and delicate. The English translation combines accuracy with excellent expression. They have not laboured to reproduce the flavour of Urdu language but have successfully embodied the merit of Sir Syed's literary style—simplicity and clarity. The translation comprising 129 pages, a commendable piece of work, enhances the usefulness of this book and deserves to be appreciated in its own right.

Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind ranks high in the political literature of the subcontinent after 1857. An outspoken expose of the Indian viewpoint and an apologia for the Muslim, this pamphlet had considerable effect on the thinking of English policy makers. Advised-

ly, it was not made available to the Indian public and all its copies were sent to eminent personages in England. Hume, was impressed by the *Asbab* and frankly admitted that he got the idea of organizing the Indian National Congress from the study of this work.¹ As late as 1892, the *Asbab* was cited in Parliamentary debates to emphasize that 'one of the direct causes of the Mutiny was the want of representative institutions'.² The *Asbab* was translated into English by Graham and Auckland Colvin and appeared under the title 'The Causes of the Indian Revolt'. Dr. Malik states that he noticed certain inaccuracies between the Urdu text and the English translation. It would have been useful if he had pointed out these inaccuracies. The obvious omission in the Urdu text is that it omits appendix iii comprising the poem of a Pindaree Muslim soldier. The English version carries 'The Old Pindaree' that reveals the state of unrest and discontent pervading the Muslim mind. This poem is not included in the *Asbab* as published in Hali's *Hayat-i-Javed*.

Sir Syed's letter to Sir John Kaye reiterates his earlier stand on the controversy about the nature of the upheaval of 1857. This letter is an important document as the summing up of the debate by Sir Syed Ahmad. However, the source of this letter is not indicated which presumably can be traced in papers of Sir John Kaye in the India Office Reference Library, London.

Hali has given a succinct account of *The Loyal Mohomedans of India*. Part II of this pamphlet is significant as it brings into focus the question of Muslim loyalty to the British Crown and seeks a juristic basis for it. Reiterating his thesis of compatibility between the Muslims and Christians, Sir Syed expounded that India was *Darul-Islam*. This theme was taken up by him later when he was called upon to make a rejoinder to the observations of Sir William Muir. This pamphlet is an elaboration of the arguments already set forth in the *Asbab*. *The Loyal Mohomedans of India* is a relatively rare booklet. By bringing it to the doorstep of scholars their burden has been lightened.

The last portion of the book under review contains documents pertaining to Sir Syed's relations with the Indian National Congress. This is in fact the reproduction of Sir Syed's booklet entitled *The Present State of Indian Politics* (Allahabad, 1888). The learned editor observes that the English translation of Sir Syed's famous speeches at Lucknow and Meerut was made by Theodore Beck and the former's son Mr. Justice Mahmud. However, a short introductory note spelling out the differences between the Urdu text of the speeches and their English translation would have been a welcome addition. In the English version, the violently political tenor of the Urdu original, has been somewhat softened to make it acceptable to the English audience.

Though 'Sayyid' is the correct transliteration of the word, it seems rather exceptional that the learned editor should have elected to change the spellings while Syed Ahmad Khan used to sign his name with the prefix Syed. For the sake of uniformity, then Mohomedans (in *An Account of the Loyal Mohomedans*) should have been either changed to Muslim or at least to Mohammedans. However such a minor point of transliteration in no way detracts from the merit of this erudite compilation.

In view of the paucity of original material in Pakistan and the difficulties which the scholars and students have to face in tracing important historical documents, it may be

affirmed that this work would positively contribute to the promotion of research in this vital field. It would be pertinent, however, to say that it would be more advantageous to consult this documentary record in conjunction with Dr. Hafeez Malik's latest interpretative study of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

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1. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 12 December 1887.
2. Hansard, 1892, Vol. III, p. 95.