

## **Contested Identities and the Muslim *Qaum* in Northern India, 1860-1900: An Exploratory Essay**

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### **Introduction**

On the afternoon of the 28th of December 1887, at exactly the same time when the third annual session of the recently founded Indian National Congress was being held in Madras under the presidentship of Badruddin Tyabji, a Sulaimani Bohra Muslim from Bombay, the soon to be knighted, the Honourable, Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadur, KCSI, began to give a lecture in Lucknow. Syed Ahmad Khan, who had held numerous titles and positions in his life, at that time was the Secretary of the Mohomedan Educational Congress, which was holding its session in Lucknow on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of December. This lecture by him, because of its nature and theme, was not part of the proceedings of the Mohomedan Educational Congress. Syed Ahmad Khan had already become 'probably the most prominent public man in northern India', had been a public figure for more than four decades of his life, and was to live yet another decade very publicly. The title of the subsequently published and widely disseminated lecture was: 'Syed Ahmad Khan's Lecture on the Indian National Congress Madras: What action should our *qaum* take with regard to the political affairs of the state?'<sup>1</sup> This lecture was to become, along with his lecture at Meerut on 16 March 1888, (incidentally with exactly the same title: 'What action should our *qaum* take with regard to the political affairs of the state?'), one of the most quoted of Syed Ahmad Khan's lectures, and resulted in numerous writers and public figures, referring to it and quoting from it. Syed Ahmad Khan began the Lucknow lecture as follows: 'I am not in the habit of giving

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<sup>1</sup> *Indian National Congress pur Syed Ahmad Khan ka Lecture: Hamari qaum ko nisbat political amoor saltanat kay kya tariqa ikhtiar karna chahiyay?*, published as a pamphlet in numerous places, including Kanpur (not dated), Amritsar 30 April 1888, in the *Amritsar Press Gazette*, etc. The lecture was also translated into English and published in the *Pioneer* from Allahabad, and also published as a separate pamphlet by the Pioneer Press.

lectures on political issues, and nor do I recall *ever* having given *any* lecture on political issues'.<sup>2</sup>

For someone whose every statement, speech, lecture and being, was highly 'political', and for someone who initiated, perhaps single-handedly, the radical changes in the outlook of the Muslim *qaum*, not just of northern India, but of the entire subcontinent, the consequences of which are still being felt and are hotly debated even today, this must come across as an understatement of historic proportions. For better or for worse, or better *and* worse, as Ralph Russell puts it, the process that Syed Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh Muslims started, aided and abetted by British colonial policy, led to the events and forces which created the preconditions – which are not the same as causes, as C A Bayly cautions us – that eventually led to the remapping of the Indian subcontinent.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to understand and evaluate what those processes were which Syed Ahmad and his colleagues initiated, and to answer a number of questions which emerge with the developments that took place between 1860-1900.

This paper will try to understand, how it was, not without a tinge of irony, that the Muslim who emerged as a pre- or emerging-modern 'secular', perhaps even irreligious being, deeply entrenched in a western educational and ideological training, emerged later in the twentieth century as the representative of the most well-organised, and vociferous element of what eventually became a separatist movement for Muslims all over India. On the other hand, the section of the Muslim *qaum* which cut itself off from the mainstream developments taking place in society and particularly with regard to western education, 'turning inwards' towards their own religion, reclaiming their identity from their religion, becoming more religious, emerged as early on as in the late nineteenth century, as participants (or at least distant supporters) of what later became a more inclusive freedom movement for India. Perhaps this conclusion will suggest that, it was not the religious anti-Hindu zeal amongst Muslims which determined their sense of being, their identity and their politics in the latter half of the nineteenth century in northern India, but merely sectional interests over issues of jobs more than anything else, with the defence of other important cultural symbols (such as language), also being a key component of their politics. The politics of Syed Ahmad and the Aligarh Muslims was a politics more about jobs and about social location, than about 'Islamic' identity or symbols.

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis added; the Urdu original is: *Meri kabhi aadat political amoor pur lecture dainay ki naheen hai aur na he mujhay yaad hai keh mein nay kabhi political amoor main koi lecture diya ho*'.

If the so-called 'separatist' tendencies amongst certain Muslims in northern India were simply about jobs and not about ideology, belief or religion and if this observation is correct, it would suggest that the claim that Muslims were 'separatists', has been grossly overstated, especially from evidence in the late nineteenth century. Sections of Muslims were claiming narrow sectional interests, mainly around jobs and with regard to some perceived images about their past glory, and their politics was rather narrow and limited to this alone. The separatist argument is also challenged by suggesting that the Muslims had never become a part, and hence could not separate, from a larger whole that was still emerging. The Muslim response and reaction to the emergence of the Indian National Congress, perhaps best supports this claim.

This paper also leads one to suggest, that for Muslims in northern India, and particularly for their leaders, the *qaum* was a northern Indian Hindustani Muslim *qaum*,<sup>3</sup> and was fractured geographically, with

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the notion *qaum* in the context of nineteenth century India, has raised numerous problems with regard to its English equivalent. It has and can be used as: nation, community, sect, religious group and country. For our purposes, we use it to mean a community which is nonterritorial, such as a Muslim *qaum* in India or Hindustan. Javed Majeed points out that, 'a diversity of terms are used to refer to the category of the community and location, such as 'qaum', mulk, ahl vatan, wilayat, which are employed in varying senses. The word 'qaum' is used to refer to religious communities (the 'qaum' of Muslims and the 'qaum' of Hindus) as well as rank, as for example the 'sharif qaum' is used to refer to high ranks, both Muslim and Hindu, in north Indian society', Majeed, Javed, 'Narratives of progress and idioms of community: Urdu periodicals of the 1870s', in David Finkelstein, and Douglas Peers (eds.), *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth Century Media* (London: McMillan, 2000), p.149. Majeed cites two cases from the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* saying that in one, 'qaum' is used to refer to Hindustanis generally (i.e., North Indians)' while in another, 'the same term is used to refer to the upper ranks in Hindustani society', *ibid.* Farzana Shaikh defines *qaum* as follows: 'a term used by sharif Indian Muslims in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century to suggest their distinct religious, racial and social ancestry', Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 1. Much contemporary writing on the nineteenth period in English, translates *qaum* almost exclusively as 'nation'. This causes a serious problem, as 'nations' in the modern usage of the term did not really exist when the term was in its particular usage. To call *qaum* 'nation', gives it greater meaning than its use in the nineteenth century meaning and context. The term 'Hindustan' too, is ambivalent; we use it here as the region in which Urdu and Hindi was spoken in the nineteenth century, largely the North West Provinces and

little concern for Muslims elsewhere in the dominion. It was largely the vision of an Urdu-speaking Muslim *qaum* which emerged amongst the *ashraf* or well-born Hindustani Muslim leadership almost exclusively north Indian, while Muslims whose mother tongue may have been Bengali, Deccani or Malayalam, were never really included in the broad category of 'the Muslim *qaum*'; the few non-north Indian representatives also began to speak about the Muslim *qaum* as if it were a Hindustani Muslim *qaum*, often forgetting their own geographical roots and Muslim constituencies. The whole notion of a Muslim *ummah* in the colonial state of British India, was reduced, by its most vocal and eloquent spokesmen, to a section of the Muslims who resided in the Hindustani belt of northern India.<sup>4</sup> As Rafiuddin Ahmed, writing about the Bengal Muslims reminds us, 'to categorise Muslims all over India as a homogenous entity... is of course grossly incorrect'.<sup>5</sup> This again suggests that it was narrow sectional interest – jobs – that was the concern of this most articulate Muslim voice, certainly not the welfare of the larger Muslim *qaum*, and nor of their religion more broadly defined. However, jobs and the acceptance by the British, were vehicles in terms of defining a particular Muslim identity.

Just as there were geographical limitations and boundaries to who was included in the 'Muslim *qaum*', there were also as many fractured identities of what constituted the *Muslim*, even in the limited geographical boundary of northern India, leave alone in the boundaries of the colonial state. Just within northern India, or actually within three or four districts of what later became the United Provinces, we find articulate and distinct Muslim voices and representations, for the most part at odds with their Muslim brethren elsewhere in the province itself. The Shias were distinct from the Sunnis – and at times vocally and actively antagonistic to each other – and while sections – largely the elite, the landlords and the *ashraf* – of both may have stood united when

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Oudh of colonial India. The Punjab is a border-line case, where although Urdu and Hindi were spoken, it lies strictly outside the realm of a cultural 'Hindustan', just as much as perhaps parts of Bihar, which was part of Bengal, might be included.

<sup>4</sup> As Rafiuddin Ahmed argues: 'if there were two religious 'nations' in India, there were many more cultural and linguistic 'nations'. Certainly what was true of the UP Muslims was not so of their co-religionists in eastern India, notwithstanding that they both professed the same faith.' See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. x.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

particular Muslim sectional interests were at stake, or were brought together under the enlightened, modernist, banner of Aligarh, their often marked differences in terms of defining the Muslim *qaum* remained and emerged at different points of time. Within the larger Sunni branch of Islam, there were perhaps far greater and insurmountable ideological, theological and even political differences, which fractured the notion of any unified Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan. Most noticeable and perhaps most important was the difference and distance between Deoband and Aligarh which continued to divide any claim to speak on behalf of the Muslim *qaum* within Hindustan. The Wahabis were yet another category of Sunni Islam who for some years up to 1871, claimed to represent yet another notion of Muslim in nineteenth century colonial India.

This short paper raises some of the emerging issues and questions which lead us to begin to understand some of the questions posed above. Although Francis Robinson argues that the 'all India Muslim politics were almost entirely those of the UP Muslims',<sup>6</sup> perhaps what is a more interesting and certainly a more important question to ask, given this substantial divide and disunity amongst different sects and groups amongst the Muslims, is: how did the voice of the instrumentalist Aligarh Muslims – those who were inside 'the charmed circle of those whom the British met socially'<sup>7</sup> – become the representational voice of the Muslim *qaum*, not just of Hindustan, but of Muslims in all of colonial India?

### **Analysing Muslims in north India**

In this section we examine some of the main points and ideas, as developed by contemporary scholars, examining the Muslim question in northern India in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Farzana Shaikh's *Community and Consensus in Islam* places Islam, and values related to it and derived from it, as the central theme that determined the politics of the Muslims for the period after 1857; for her, it was the *leitmotif* of Muslim consciousness and Muslim action in colonial India. She argues that, 'the decline of Muslim power and the consolidation of British rule, far from resulting in massive Muslim

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<sup>6</sup> Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 354.

<sup>7</sup> The correct phrase is with regard to the Deoband *ulema* who were amongst those Indian Muslims who were 'outside the charmed circle of those whom the British met socially'. See Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 172.

resignation, led to renewed and vigorous efforts to renew the dignity of Islam and the political fortunes of its adherents'.<sup>8</sup> Political fortunes, most certainly, but 'the dignity of Islam', perhaps not. She believes that while the *ulema* and particularly those from Deoband were concerned about safeguarding Islam and to 'protect Islam as a cultural entity', the Aligarh liberals believed 'that the survival of Islam in India depended ultimately upon its regeneration as a political community rather than upon its defence as a mere cultural ideal'.<sup>9</sup> For her, the outlook of the 'politically active urban Muslim owed to the norms of a sharif culture grounded in Mughal tradition and to the assumptions of their religious faith. The preoccupation of Muslims... reflect their debt to their Mughal tradition and to *Islamically derived modes of thinking*'.<sup>10</sup>

As we show in the Appendix, particularly with regard to Aligarh and the product it produced, this was not the case, and while the graduates of Aligarh did certainly relate to some idea of a Muslim culture and to Muslim heritage – although they also became quite alienated to it -- they did not really relate to 'Islamically derived modes of thinking'. Barbara Metcalf in her study on Hakim Ajmal Khan writes that it is 'important to underline one characteristic of this [the larger Aligarh] programme: neither the focus on interests nor their concern for Muslim culture are in a sense 'religious' except in so far as they ensure the status and self-confidence of the old Muslim elite'.<sup>11</sup> She argues that the cultural symbols that this generation used 'might be called cosmopolitan or Islamicate symbols, that is symbols derived from those aspects of civilization associated with Islam in which non-Muslims played significant roles. They are, quite literally, worldly symbols ... [and] contrast with the very different kinds of religious symbols that became prominent later on'.<sup>12</sup> This distinction between a *Muslim* way of being in colonial India, ordained by cultural patterns and networks including non-Muslim ones, is distinct from an *Islamic* way of being in colonial India, and in the arguments presented in the Appendix, in fact, helps explain why the *qaum* was as fractured as it was. The sensibility of the Hindustani Muslim was not so much related to 'Islamic practice but to

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<sup>8</sup> Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228-29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 'Nationalist Muslims in British India: The Case of Hakim Ajmal Khan', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 19, No 1, 1985, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

pride in Muslim culture and Muslim identity'.<sup>13</sup> While the Muslim adapted to his changed circumstance and aspired to public office and government jobs attempting to reclaim his lost position in his glorious recent past, the Islamicist was more concerned with safeguarding his faith in the changed reality of colonial India, and hence shunned and remained antipathetic to the colonial masters. Although both may have shared a common code of Islam – although as we show in the Appendix, there were perhaps more fractures in the interpretation of this code than there was unity – social and class differences also broke this myth of a unified notion of either Muslim or Islamic unity, with the well-born becoming a somewhat secularised Muslim, and those from the lower middle class and petty traders, moving to more formal Islamic ways of being.

Francis Robinson, perhaps unwittingly, dates the beginning of communalism to the middle of the nineteenth century, and he holds the politics of Syed Ahmad Khan in particular, and of the Aligarh School more generally, responsible for taking the lead in fomenting communal feelings in North India. Robinson writes: 'much of the growth of a more communal approach to affairs among the Urdu-speaking elite between 1858-69 can be understood in the development of the ideas and of the political and educational initiatives of Syed Ahmad Khan'.<sup>14</sup> By stating that Syed Ahmad Khan by 1869 started talking 'for the first time of purely Muslim progress and from this moment devoted himself to work entirely on behalf of the Muslims', Robinson sees the divide between Hindus and Muslims hardening and moving along 'communal' lines.<sup>15</sup> However, Farzana Shaikh disagrees and argues that what the Aligarh liberals 'stressed was not communal withdrawal and the intensification of religious faith but the consolidation of a distinct Muslim identity shaped by the forces of modern, Western education and intelligible to their new imperial masters'.<sup>16</sup> We will attempt to show in the Appendix, that while there might not have been a clearly defined and mapped Muslim, or Hindu, identity – what Bayly calls an 'identifiable 'Muslim', 'Hindu' or 'Sikh' identity'<sup>17</sup> – in the last quarter of the nineteenth century

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> Farzana Shaikh, *op.cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>17</sup> C.A. Bayly, 'The Prehistory of Communalism', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 19. No. 2, 1985.

‘identifiable identities’ were visible and had been created by numerous factors, but these identities were sectional rather than communal, i.e., the fractured Muslim *qaum*, with more than one identity. While perhaps identities may have begun to be formed, two ‘nations’, certainly did not exist. As Paul Brass, using a modernization interpretation, adds: ‘the two religious communities did not constitute two nations in the nineteenth century, if only because the idea of nationalism had not yet entered the minds of the educated elites’.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the Aligarh ideology which became the most articulate representative of Muslims in northern India, because it was jobs and recognition that they sought from the British, the political stand became and remained loyal and pro-British rather than anti-Hindu. As we show in the Appendix, even Syed Ahmad Khan’s opposition to the Indian National Congress and a strong Muslim sense of community, was not a communal anti-Hindu stance, but a political position taken to safeguard elite and well-born Muslim sectional interests, and as a result, creating a narrow definition and use of the term *qaum*. (More interestingly, it was the more overtly Islamic groups which supported and welcomed the Congress, which again questions the communal label associated with late nineteenth century Muslims and Islam). Only a very narrow teleological reading, such as Robinson’s, would call these sectional instrumental interests communal.<sup>19</sup>

The Paul Brass thesis locates Muslim separatism and communalism in north India at the end of the nineteenth century – at the time when Hindu and Muslim revivalist movements come into their own – although he takes a considerably different route in getting there.<sup>20</sup> Brass argues that the ‘ideology of Muslim separateness did not follow necessarily and inexorably out of the objective differences between Hindu and Muslim, but out of the *uses which were made* of those differences through the manipulation of symbols of Muslim unity and Hindu-Muslim separateness by an elite concerned to preserve its political privileges’.<sup>21</sup> There is a clear underlying tone of a separatism in his argument and as he builds his case of the conscious selection and manipulative use of religious symbols. For him ‘the history of Muslim

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Jones also argues that ‘communal lines hardened’ in the India of the early- and mid-nineteenth century. See Kenneth Jones, *Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*, The New Cambridge History of India, 3.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Brass, *op.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.



separatism demonstrates two important general features in the development of the nationalist movements – the primacy of political choice and the ways in which a people creates its own history through a conscious process of symbol selection'.<sup>22</sup> Brass argues that the 'objective differences between Muslims and Hindus and the objective circumstances of the Muslims in the north were less important in creating Muslim solidarity than the subjective process of symbol manipulation and myth creation', and the Muslim elite successfully created a Muslim separatism in north India using religious symbols, built myths about its past, had access to a 'socially mobilised population', and had the need for political organization. For Brass, while Muslim separatism was not 'preordained', it 'resulted from the conscious manipulation of selected symbols of Muslim identity by Muslim elite groups in economic and political competition with each other and with elite groups among Hindu'.<sup>23</sup>

One can read Brass' work somewhat differently, in a non-communal manner as well. He continues to talk about Hindu and Muslim elites contesting a limited public (read: official/governmental) space, which bought them into competition with each other. It was largely about jobs, power and privilege. Hence, while myths were created regarding a lost past (of the Muslims), if the 'separatism' was largely about jobs, can one really call this 'separatism', or worse, 'communalism', as he does on so many occasions? He argues that the 'Muslim leaders in North India in the late nineteenth century did not recognise a common destiny with the Hindus because they were themselves in danger of losing their privileges as a dominant community...'.<sup>24</sup> If the creation of these myths and the artful, machiavellian, manipulation of religious symbols is a mere tool, a strategy to get ahead and get jobs, and not something more basic and intrinsic to the Hindu and Muslim identity i.e. 'preordained', then, is this the creation of 'false consciousness' regarding communalism and separatism?

Barbara Metcalf's study on Deoband<sup>25</sup> and David Leliveld's on Aligarh,<sup>26</sup> both examine two of the most important institutions which

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Brass, 'Elite Groups, Symbols Manipulation and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia', in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp, (eds.), *Political Identity in South Asia*, London, 1979, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Brass, *op.cit.*, 1974, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, Princeton, 1982.

were related to, and had a significant impact on, Muslim senses of being in the late nineteenth century. Metcalf's very intensive and detailed study of one seminary in northern India, is a backdrop to the response that the Muslims in Hindustan, in particular, were making to their considerably changed circumstances after 1857. While it focuses on the *darul uloom* at Deoband, it also provides a comprehensive dialogue on the emergence and ideology of a number of other groups propagating religious identity and differing theological interpretations. Given these numerous responses of Muslims to developments in the nineteenth century, Metcalf shows that Islam in north India was particularly vibrant, evolving, dynamic and renegotiating itself with regard to its tradition. While acknowledging that significant cultural change did take place through the adoption of western values by some Muslims, her argument is that Muslims, of all ilk, became more 'self conscious' about themselves, and that the 'salient feature of Muslim history' in the later nineteenth century was a period of 'religious self consciousness and religious revival'.<sup>27</sup> Even the movement started by Syed Ahmad Khan around Aligarh, for her, bears this imprint. The Deoband school, she argues, 'turned away' from issues of the organization of the state and society, 'toward a concern with the moral qualities of individual Muslims'.<sup>28</sup> This 'strategy of turning within', for her did not make the Deobandis immune from the larger colonial world around them, but helped them negotiate better by concentrating on the self. The Deobandis were never 'alienated' or 'marginal' to the developments around them and for Metcalf, 'remained integrated in their society'. A key feature of her study relates to the social location of the *ulema* of Deoband and of other seminaries (particularly the *Ahle Hadith*) in northern India. Metcalf takes great pains to argue that the *ulema* belonged largely to the *ashraf* and influenced not just the lower classes but also those who were in a position of influence and in the government employ, and particularly the urban *ashraf*.<sup>29</sup> The leadership of the *Ahle Hadith* was from the 'well born', came from 'socially eminent' families, and as many as a quarter were in government or princely service and were 'all in very high positions', yet there were

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<sup>26</sup> David Leliveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, Princeton, 1978.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982, p. 316.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238. However, Peter Hardy disagrees with this formulation. See Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 168-9.

many who 'were of families who had fallen on poor times'.<sup>30</sup> She also argues that while the Deobandis were antagonistic to the British, like all the other movements, 'wanted at least their loyalty recognized'; and amongst the different spokesmen for the *qaum*, 'there were mutual accusations of toadyism and disloyalty'.<sup>31</sup> With the growth of the press and with Urdu becoming the accepted lingua franca of Muslims, this period also saw a considerable degree of internal dispute being publicly generated between different religious groups.

David Lelleveld's equally expansive study of Aligarh's first generation, examines how Indian Muslims in the late nineteenth century, negotiated and mediated their own sense of being in light of the 'colonial restructuring of political institutions'. He attempts and succeeds at showing the 'relationship between institutional innovation and changing cultural configurations' in the north Indian social and cultural context. He examines the notion and context of 'what it meant to be a Muslim in British India', in relation to social identity within the changing and new, political institutions of colonial India. Lelleveld's is also a substantive institutional study of the workings and functioning of the Aligarh college where this category of Muslim in British India was being moulded, and contains detailed evaluation of the influence and role of Syed Ahmad Khan, Shibli and many of the English principals of the College. A key theme that emerges in this work – in fact, Lelleveld states it on at least four occasions, but never once supporting it with a reference – is that the Aligarh project was designed as one where the 'constant and explicit aim of the college was to raise up a distinguished cohort of public leaders for the Muslims of India',<sup>32</sup> and that, 'in many respects, politics was what Aligarh was all about',<sup>33</sup> i.e., create an overt and conscious political Muslim *qaum*. It is difficult to say whether Lelleveld is actually stating this on the basis of some evidence, of what was said at that time, or whether he is inferring something for himself. Clearly, if it is the former, this has a very different meaning and different connotations compared to if it is the latter. Moreover, while Lelleveld's canvass deals with Aligarh's first generation, one feels that he does not quite capture the several nuances that moulded and made their strong imprint on this generation. Although he does mention them, one feels that he does not fully capture the cultural connotations and cultural repercussions of the mould into which these students were cast. The huge dis-connect

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982., p. 268.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>32</sup> Lelleveld, *op.cit.* p. 250.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

between the past in its cultural manifestation and the forced distancing from all things traditional, and immersed in a hugely alien intellectual and cultural environment, while perhaps in some ways extraordinarily revolutionary, is bound to have created a most schizoid New Aligarh Man representing a section of the Muslim *qaum*.

**‘The most prominent public man in northern India’**

Of the three most important Muslim men in India between 1857-1947, Syed Ahmad Khan must emerge as the most controversial and complex. This is not to suggest that Jinnah or for that matter, even Iqbal (or even Azad), were easy to comprehend and followed a straight and narrow path ideologically or politically, but perhaps given the expanse of Syed Ahmad’s writing and thought, both in terms of volume and diversity, and in particular, because of the historical juncture when he wrote and put into practice his views, his is a far more difficult legacy to unbundle. Also, since he predates the other two, and hence laid the path and the preconditions on which the other two built, his is bound to be a bigger burden of whatever it is that he bears. Furthermore, the subsequent partition of India on religious lines, makes Syed Ahmad Khan’s location on the intellectual, ideological and political map of colonial India, even more complex. As a consequence, it is not possible for anyone examining Syed Ahmad’s role in the period between 1857 and 1898 when he died, to escape the label of being called either an ‘apologist’, defending Syed Ahmad against claims of being a communalist and for being the real proponent of the two-nation theory, or for subscribing to precisely such a theory.

The term *qaum*, in loco and in translation, has created far more problems than one can care to admit. In most cases the English translations ‘nation’ or ‘nationality’ are used, but often, so are ‘country’, ‘community’, ‘brotherhood’, and so on. Nevertheless, the understanding of the term *qaum*, and the use that it has been put to, is essential to enable us to plot the map of the location and differences amongst Muslims and others in north India. Trying to disentangle the meaning of the use of the term *qaum*, and the use put to it by Syed Ahmad, is a very difficult task. One can find countless examples and contexts where the term has been used by him, revealing perhaps to some, the complete arbitrariness in the meaning of the term, and perhaps even his use of it. While the far too numerous examples of a separate Hindu and Muslim *qaum* abound in his writings, and have probably correctly been taken to mean Syed Ahmad’s idea of the term *qaum*, there are other examples which only help make a proper understanding of this notion difficult, ambiguous and highly

controversial. Perhaps some examples from just twenty days of Syed Ahmad's life might indicate the extent of the ambiguity and controversy.

On 22 January 1884, Syed Ahmad Khan left Aligarh with three other travelling companions for a twenty day tour of the Punjab, in which he visited and spoke – often three or four times a day – in eight towns and cities, visiting Amritsar and Jullandhar both twice. Syed Ahmad Khan spoke in front of numerous audiences, including journalists, members of the Anjuman-Himayat-e-Islam, the Indian Association Lahore, an Arya Samaj delegation in Lahore, and at the residences of a number of raeeses and nawabs, as well at public gatherings at schools. This was a very public tour with news of the travels and talks/lectures of Syed Ahmad Khan reported in local and regional newspapers, often with the newspaper's own commentary and 'remarks'. The entire trip, along with all addresses and delegations received by Syed Ahmad, and Syed Ahmad's reply to those addresses as well as his other numerous speeches, were recorded by one of Syed Ahmad's three travelling companions, Syed Iqbal Ali Sahib, acting sub-judge Barabanki, and published by the Aligarh Institute Press the same year.<sup>34</sup>

On 2 February 1884, an Arya Samaj deputation was presented to Syed Ahmad led by Munshi Jiwan Das, Secretary of the Arya Samaj, along with 'forty to fifty honourable and respected members'. Lala Sangam Lal spoke, thanked 'Syed Sahib' for coming to Lahore and said that the purpose of their delegation was as follows: 'that your coming to Lahore brings respect and honour, especially to the Muslims, but the Hindus of our *mulk*, on whose behalf we have come, also feel the same respect and honour due to your arrival and presence, even though you are not a Hindu; it is a great sense of pride/honour that there is such a reformer like you in our *mulk*, and that you are involved in the reformation of the respected and large *qaum* such as the Muslims, with your true heart [sincerity]'.<sup>35</sup> After this, Lala Sangam Lal spoke about the unbiased and unprejudiced policy of the *madrsast-ul-uloom* (i.e., the college at Aligarh), which any student of any religion can join. He spoke about the contribution Syed Ahmad had made to (on behalf of) the Hindus as a member of the Legislative Council.

Syed Ahmad replied as follows: 'This word that you have used, Hindu, in my opinion, is not correct, because in my opinion, Hindu is not the name of any religion, but everyone who lives in Hindustan, can call himself a Hindu. I am very disappointed, that despite the fact that I

<sup>34</sup> Syed Iqbal Ali, *Syed Ahmad Khan ka safarnama-e Punjab* (Aligarh: Aligarh Institute Press, 1884).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

belong to [live in] Hindustan, you do not consider me a Hindu (very loud cheers). I am sure you recognise this fact, that for the welfare [progress] of Hindustan, it is essential, that the people of Hindu and the people of Islam,<sup>36</sup> should work together for their *mulk*. Until this does not happen, the progress of Hindustan cannot be considered as the true progress of all of Hindustan, because the '*ghair qaum*' all call us, whether we are Muslims or Hindus – forgive me for I am using the term Hindu in this very particular sense – one word, which is 'Hindustani'. Our progress cannot be seen [or cannot happen] separately, as the progress of the people of Hindu and the progress of the people of Islam, but instead, [must be] the complete [full] progress and stability of all of Hindustan'.<sup>37</sup>

On the next day, 3 February 1884 in Lahore, Dayal Singh, President of the Indian Association Lahore, along with eighteen signatories<sup>38</sup> presented their Address to Syed Ahmad Khan. The Address read:

Our Association, composed of members of all races and creeds in this Province, have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the high character of your services to the public ... Not the least remarkable feature of your public career has been the breadth of your views and your liberal attitude towards sections of the community other than your co-religionists. Your conduct throughout has been stainless of bias or bigotry ... Our unhappy country is so split up with petty religious and sectarian jealousies and had suffered so much in the past from sectarian and religious dissensions, that the advent of a man of your large-hearted and liberal views is a matter of peculiar congratulations at this time. Long may you be spared to inculcate knowledge among Mohammedan and Hindu alike, and, by eradicating prejudice and bigotry from their minds, to unite them in the firm bonds of fraternal union.<sup>39</sup>

Syed Ahmad replied by saying that: 'It is a matter of great pleasure for me to learn that your Association is composed of members

<sup>36</sup> In the original: '*ahle Hindu and ahle Islam*', i.e., those who belong to, of.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>38</sup> Of whom five were Muslims, one a Parsee, and thirteen Hindus.

<sup>39</sup> In Syed Iqbal Ali's travelogue, in a few cases, both the Urdu and English version of an Address or speech are given one after the other. This Address by the Indian Association Lahore here, is from the English version which is probably the original, for later on an Urdu translation is also supplied. See, Syed Iqbal Ali, *Syed Ahmad Khan ka safarnama-e Punjab* (Aligarh: Aligarh Institute Press, 1884), p. 156-7.

of all classes and creeds; this is not only a matter of great pleasure, but this union reflects a light at its foundation which gives a hope that our dear India [India in the English translation, Hindustan in the original Urdu speech] is still capable of advancement'.<sup>40</sup> Syed Ahmad Khan talks about the Hindus and Muslims as 'two brothers', saying that there is 'not the least discrimination' between the two with regard to the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which the Address had praised for its openness towards Hindus. Syed Ahmad continues: 'I regard the Hindu and Mohammadans as my two eyes', but says so that people don't claim that his right eye is preferable to the left one, says that 'I regard both Hindus and Mohammadans as one single eye'.<sup>41</sup>

Talking about his role in the Legislative Council, which was also mentioned in the Address very favourably, Syed Ahmad states that:

It was my earnest and sincerest desire that I faithfully should serve my *mulk* and *qaum*.<sup>42</sup> By the term *qaum* [*nation*, in the English translation] I mean both Hindu and Muslim. This is the way I define the term nation (*qaum*). In my opinion, it does not matter what their religious beliefs are, because we cannot see anything in this [difference?], but what we can see is that all of us, whether we are Hindus or Muslims, live on the same land, are governed by one and the same ruler, have the same sources for our advantage, equally share similar hardships of famine. These are the different reasons [grounds] on the basis of which, I designate both these *qaums* [communities, in the English translation] that live in Hindustan [India, in the English translation] with one word [expression] which is 'Hindu' ['Hindu nation', in English translation], in other words, those *qaums* that live in Hindustan.<sup>43</sup>

Both these speeches made by Syed Ahmad on his visit to the Punjab, were made in front of mixed religious groups. In the speeches that he gave which were organised by Muslim organisations or by the raeeses and nawabs, Syed Ahmad Khan refers to the *qaum* as the Muslim *qaum*. The niceties which were conveyed to the inter-religious

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159; this is from the English translation of the speech.

<sup>42</sup> *Mulk* and *qaum* are in the Urdu original; in the English translation provided, *mulk* is translated as 'country', and *qaum* as an italicized '*nation*'.

<sup>43</sup> Syed Iqbal Ali, *op.cit.*, p. 167. This is from the Urdu original. The English translation given to this last sentence is as follows: 'These are the various grounds on which I designate both the communities that inhabit India by the expression Hindu nation'. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

conglomerations about odd notions of the term '*qaum*', now seem lost, though nowhere does Syed Ahmad ever make derogatory remarks against the Hindus.

Perhaps the most challenging stage in the latter half of Syed Ahmad Khan's public career came after the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. It was striving to be an 'Indian' and 'National' organisation, representing all 'qaums', Muslim, Hindu, Bengalis, Madrasis, and all others as well. Perhaps, this was the moment when the allegations of being communal or a Muslim separatist would be most noticeable in the speeches and writings of Syed Ahmad Khan. In response to retain the prestige and position that he had acquired, and seeing the Congress as a political and personal threat, if Syed Ahmad was preaching 'communalism' or propagating Muslim 'separatism', it would be most vivid now. However, while Syed Ahmad was adamantly anti-Congress, all in order to protect the sectional interests of Muslims, whose case he was fighting, *nowhere does Syed Ahmad Khan appear to be anti-Hindu*. In none of his speeches where he attacks the Congress on political grounds, does he attack Hindus. Syed Ahmad Khan does not see the Indian National Congress as a Hindu organisation, although he does argue that it does not represent the Muslim *qaum*. It was at this time, 1885, when David Lellyveld feels, that Syed Ahmad Khan had become the 'most prominent public man in northern India' and hence, his each and every utterance was of great significance.<sup>44</sup> (It is interesting, in contrast, however, to hear what Syed Iqbal Ali had to say in 1884 while writing the Introduction to his *Syed Ahmad Khan ka safarnama-e Punjab*. Syed Iqbal Ali makes the rather curious remark talking about the triumph that the Punjab tour was, saying that, 'although in the districts of the North West Provinces and in the province of Oudh, as it ought to be, there may be no respect [value] for him [Syed Ahmad Khan] but the people of the Punjab have proven that this man who is involved in the *qaum*'s welfare, the *qaum*'s consideration, the *qaum*'s progress, this reformer of the age, is hugely valued'.<sup>45</sup>)

Although the Indian National Congress had been formed in December 1885, there was no mention of it nor any story or article related to it in any issue of the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* throughout 1886. There were news reports about the British parliamentary elections that year, on the 'Political Situation in England', the war in Burma, on the Suez Canal, numerous speeches by Lady Dufferin, and extended

<sup>44</sup> David Lellyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, Princeton, 1978, p 305.

<sup>45</sup> Syed Iqbal Ali, *op.cit.*, p. 8.



coverage, in almost every issue, on the colonial and Indian exhibition in London. In 1887, much of the news coverage in the *Gazette* revolved around the jubilee celebrations taking place in Britain and countless places in India. For almost the entire year, the only mention of any 'Congress' in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* was the Mohomedan Educational Congress to be held on December 27 and 28, at Lucknow. The first mention of the National Congress in the *Gazette* is on 5 November 1887.

On 5 November, the *Gazette* states, rather nonchalantly, that 'we have seen two articles which appeared in the columns of the *Pioneer* about the National Congress which is to be held this year in Madras ... We publish in our issue today one of these articles with an Urdu translation, and the second will appear in another issues'.<sup>46</sup> Both the articles which were published in the *Pioneer* and now republished and translated here, were by no one other than the Principal of the Mohomedan Anglo-Oriental College, Theodore Beck. Following Beck's articles and the realisation that the National Congress was emerging as a force in opposition to Syed Ahmad Khan's politics and position, and perhaps disturbing the notion being created of a Muslim *qaum*, the Siddons Union Club, also, for once, became involved in the real politics of the country. On Wednesday 2 November 1887, when Beck would probably have completed and sent his articles to the *Pioneer*, the Union debated the motion; 'That this House is of the opinion that Representative Government is not suited to India at present'.<sup>47</sup> With the Principal Mr Beck in the chair, the motion was carried, with seven in favour of it and four against. On 18 January 1888, once again the Siddons Union Club was brought to real life when it debated the motion following the Madras session of the Congress, as follows: 'That this House disapproves of the methods of the National Congress', with the motion being carried 10 to 1.<sup>48</sup>

The reasons for Theodore Beck and particularly Syed Ahmad being drawn into the National Congress debate relate to the developments related to the presidentship of the Indian National Congress. Husain Tyabji writing his father, Badruddin Tyabji's biography, writes that in the end of 1887 before the Madras session of the Congress, 'no Muslim leader till then opposed the Congress. The field was open to all. Syed Ahmad Khan, who had been a great nationalist in the days of Lord Ripon, had not yet opened his mouth

<sup>46</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 5 November 1887.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 November 1887.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 November 1888.

against the Congress'.<sup>49</sup> David Lellyveld argues that 'it seems that Saiyyid Ahmad's first inclination was to keep silent, but when Tyabji was chosen as president of the third Indian National Congress, it became clear that such silence would be maintained only at the cost of forfeiting his claim to leadership of the Muslims of North India. Sayyid Ahmad chose the occasion of Tyabji's presidency to come out publicly against the Conference'.<sup>50</sup> While Syed Ahmad Khan's attack against the Congress at this juncture could have been on account of questions raised as to who is to lead and represent and speak for the Muslim *qaum*, by claiming to be both 'Indian' and 'National', the Congress was also challenging the idea of a Muslim *qaum* outside of the idea of the Indian and national. If it was an Indian and a national which was beginning to claim to speak for all Indians, the enclave of the Muslim *qaum* was bound to be encroached.

The Lucknow and Meerut lectures, two-and-a-half months apart, with the same title, sum up Syed Ahmad's arguments for the defence of Muslim interests and why the Congress demands would make the Muslims effectively into a minority.<sup>51</sup> Syed Ahmad argued that because Hindus were better skilled, better educated and more 'advanced', and also because they were far greater than the Muslims in his 'Hindustan', they would dominate all forms of elected and representational office, leaving Muslims by the wayside. However, he did not make any derogatory statements against the Hindus in either of these speeches and even said, repeatedly, that while the Hindus are more advanced than us, they can't alone take the lead. He said, that 'we all live in the same mulk', and that both Hindus and Muslims should work together. In his Meerut lecture where he warns his Muslim brothers against the pitfalls of joining the Congress, he also says that, 'what I am going to say is not only useful for our *qaum*, but since our Hindu brothers of our *mulk*, have also joined [the Congress] out of their unthinking and mistake, what I

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<sup>49</sup> Husain Tyabji, , *Badruddin Tyabji: A Biography* (Bombay: Thacker and Company, 1952), p. 180.

<sup>50</sup> David Lellyveld, *op.cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>51</sup> At this stage we are only trying to argue that even in these trying times for Muslims and Syed Ahmad, he did not hide under the refuge of 'communalism' and become anti-Hindu, but argued for the defence of Muslim interests. We are not, at the moment, looking at Syed Ahmad's political objections to the Congress, which we will do at a later stage.

will say will be useful for them as well'.<sup>52</sup> He argues that 'Hindus should stay together with the Muslims in their *mulk*, and the people of our *mulk* will gain nothing by going ahead and joining with them [the Bengalis]'.<sup>53</sup> While there is not a single statement against the Hindus in either of these speeches, about the Bengalis, Syed Ahmad Khan had a great deal to say, which for us, more than anything else, defines his notion of the territoriality of his Hindustan.

Syed Ahmad's geographical boundaries of *qaum* and his vision of a Hindustan suggest that this arena, and perhaps even his ambition, was related to the Muslim *qaum* located only in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, the Punjab and perhaps in Bihar. As an example, while he was the secretary of the Mohomedan Educational Congress (set up in response to the Indian National Congress in 1886), for ten years, between 1886-96, the Congress – later renamed the Mohomedan Educational Conference – met only once outside the UP under his tenure. During the next ten years under Mohsin ul Mulk, the Conference met five times outside the UP. While this change between 1896-1906 was also a sign of the changing times, it was also a reflection of Syed Ahmad's constituency and his limited view of the (Hindustani) Muslim *qaum*.

It seems also, that Syed Ahmad Khan did not travel much out of the North West Provinces and Oudh except to the Punjab and to Calcutta as a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council. In his *Lekcharon ka mujmua*,<sup>54</sup> the collection of his lectures published in 1892, between 1864 and 1892, forty-two lectures are recorded. Yet, only one is delivered in Calcutta, and that too, as early as 6 October 1863 at the house of Maulvi Abdul Lateef. With the exception of the Punjab tour made in early 1884, and some other lectures in the Punjab, and two at Patna, all lectures were delivered in the North West Provinces and Oudh. There are a few speeches made as a member of the Legislative Council, but it is not stated whether these were in Simla or Calcutta. From this it seems that Syed Ahmad Khan did not travel much out of his own region of Hindustan, and that he did not visit or lecture in those other pockets

<sup>52</sup> *Indian National Congress pur Syed Ahmad Khan ka Lecture: Hamari qaum ko nisbat political amoor saltanat kay kya tariqa ikhtiar karna chahiyay?*, Meerut, 16 March 1888.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Lekcharon ka majmua*, with a Preface by Munshi Sirajuddin Ahmad Sahib (Sadhora: Bilal Press, 1892). There is also an earlier version of the same, with fewer lectures, published by the same press, in 1890. All the lectures in the 1890 edition are included in the 1892 one.

where non-Hindustani Muslims lived, such as the Presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. In contrast, Syed Ameer Ali of Calcutta, who was another Muslim of importance towards the end of the nineteenth century who set up the Central National Mohammedan Association in Calcutta, travelled far and wide across India and his Association had as many as 53 branches in Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Madras, the Punjab, and the United Provinces.<sup>55</sup> This suggests, though tentatively, that for Syed Ahmad, his constituency was almost exclusively the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan, not India. In a signed statement in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* of 4 May 1886, when he was describing the main aims and objectives of the Mohomedan Educational Congress, Syed Ahmad Khan described the need to gather Muslims into the Congress from the following areas: 'People from the North Western Provinces, Oudh and the Punjab, and also people from Bihar whose language, manners and customs are more akin to those of this province and Oudh, should be admitted as members of the Congress'.<sup>56</sup> Not mentioned or included in this membership drive were the Bengali Muslims in colonial India.

In his reply to the Address to the Indian Association Lahore on 3 February 1888, an Association which had a large number of Bengalis as members, Syed Ahmad Khan said: 'I confess that the Bengalis are the only *qaum* [people, in English translation] in our mulk [country, in English translation] of whom we can be rightly proud. It is solely on account of them that the progress of learning, the progress of liberty, and the feelings of patriotism have spread to our mulk [country, in English translation]. I can rightly say that they are certainly at the head of all the qaums [peoples, in English translation] of India'.<sup>57</sup> However, after the third session of the Indian National Congress, Syed Ahmad's tone and position changed markedly.

Amidst loud cheers in Lucknow speaking about what action should our *qaum* take with regard to the political affairs of the state, Syed Ahmad begins to attack the Bengali leadership of the Indian National Congress by implying that the Bengalis are cowards. Comparing the Muslims and the Hindus with the Bengalis, and taking about the bravery and traditions of the Rajputs and Pathans, he asks how we can allow ourselves to be ruled by the Bengalis 'who see a knife and fall off their chairs'. He adds, that 'there will not be a single piece of the mulk where

<sup>55</sup> Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims: A Political History (1858-1947)* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1959), p. 51.

<sup>56</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 4 May 1886.

<sup>57</sup> Syed Iqbal Ali, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

except the Bengalis, no one will be able to govern us or administer justice. Although we are happy that our Bengali brothers are making progress, but what will happen to administration?... How will the Rajputs and Pathans... stay under [in the control of] the Bengalis?... We eat neither fish nor are we afraid that if we eat with a knife and fork, we will cut our fingers (cheers)'.<sup>58</sup> In the Meerut lecture, Syed Ahmad Khan ups the ante a little further. He says: 'As you know our Bengali friends are showing a lot of enthusiasm in political issues. Three years ago they set up a very large gathering which meets regularly every year and they have called this the National Congress.... We appreciate the achievements of the Bengalis; they are far ahead of us, but they have not reached the stage [place] where they claim they have... I want to tell our *qaum* what is good for them and what is not, and I will also talk about the damage that our *qaum* will suffer if it joins the opinions of the Bengalis'.<sup>59</sup>

The main anger, and it is anger, that Syed Ahmad directs against the Bengalis is on account of their claim that the Madras session of the Indian National Congress was attended by Muslims. He says, 'if our Bengali friends had not made the mistake of saying that the Muslims had participated [in their meeting in Madras], we would have no business with the National Congress nor with its members. We don't care whether the members of the 'National Congress' [can rise to such heights that they can] touch the sky and the stars. We are happy for them. But when two or three of our *qaum* join them, under duress and under such shameful circumstances, and then they say the entire Muslim *qaum* is with them, then it is compulsory for us to refute this'.<sup>60</sup> Adding that except for Badruddin Tyabji 'whom I greatly respect, no leader or raees participated at Madras. His participation in the Congress and his opinion cannot be considered to be the opinion of the entire *qaum* and his acceptance of the 'National Congress' cannot be acceptance by the entire *qaum*'. Syed Ahmad then begins to distant 'our *qaum*', which in this case is composed of both Hindus and Muslims of 'our mulk', from the Bengalis.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Indian National Congress pur Syed Ahmad Khan ka Lecture: Hamari qaum ko nisbat political amoor saltanat kay kya tariqa ikhtiar karna chahiyay?*, Amritsar 30 April 1888.

<sup>59</sup> *Hamari qaum ko nisbat political amoor saltanat kay kya tariqa ikhtiar karna chahiyay?*, 16 March 1888, Meerut.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

He says, let those Bengali people do whatever they want; neither their manners are like that of the people of our mulk, and nor are their circumstances like those of the people of our mulk. What is the point of the people of our mulk [*hamaray mulk kay log*] participating with them, he asks. He adds then, that in Bengal about half are Muslims and a little over half Bengalis, but adds that no Muslim in Bengal is part of the Congress. Syed Ahmad Khan says that, 'the Muslims over there have absolutely no idea what this 'National Congress' is about and what happens in it'. He says that we do not consider the business of the Bengalis 'good [useful] for our Muslim brothers'.<sup>62</sup>

What is interesting, however, is that Syed Ahmad Khan does not use this fact to build bridges with Bengali Muslims at all. He seems interested in only holding on to his own position in Hindustan, although the anti-Bengali aspect of the Congress, in which hardly any Bengali Muslims participated, would have allowed Syed Ahmad to bring other Muslims together under his leadership. This again suggests, that Syed Ahmad's politics and reform movement was only meant for and focussed towards the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan and not to Muslims in 'India' even when the opportunity arose to do so.

It seems that Syed Ahmad knew exactly what he was doing and knew the predictable reaction to his Lucknow lecture. In a signed article in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* a few weeks after his Lucknow lecture, he wrote in Urdu – an article which was not translated into English, as were most articles – that 'it was obvious and essential, in fact, inevitable, that because of our Lucknow lecture, our Bengali friends and some of our Hindu countrymen [the Urdu word used is *humwatan*] brothers, would get upset'.<sup>63</sup> In all this, his attack against the Bengalis and the Congress, which is based more on the fact that a Muslim other than Syed Ahmad Khan was being recognised as a prominent 'national' political figure and that the Syed had been sidestepped, one learns something about Syed Ahmad's notion of *qaum*, *mulk*, and Hindustan. What is interesting to observe, is that while Syed Ahmad was limited to and a captive of his Hindustan, the religious groups, were freer to speak to and about the *ummah*, within India and in the form of pan-Islamic identity. Within India, the Deobandis, for example, 'took pride in reaching out to all people and claimed to speak for all Muslims'.<sup>64</sup> It also says a great deal about his own sense of insecurity and pride.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 3 February 1888.

<sup>64</sup> Metcalf, Barbara, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, Princeton, 1982, p. 355.

### The making of the Aligarh Man

The Aligarh Man, the product of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College started by Syed Ahmad Khan, was a completely New Man, created through a break and disjuncture from his past. While Syed Ahmad Khan's main principle and goal was reclaiming a lost sense of identity and dignity based on past tradition, and himself a highly traditional and religious man, oddly, the product of his creation emerges as a man well outside his own history, alien to and contemptuous of his tradition and past, and completely subservient to his English principals with unswerving loyalty to the Crown, and perhaps a highly alienated and distant Man from his past and his traditions. Syed Ahmad Khan had himself wanted to create a college where its aim would be 'to form a class of persons, Mohammedan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions and intellect'.<sup>65</sup> The Muslim *qaum* was being drastically redefined and remoulded.

The Englishness of the Aligarh graduate was probably the most important feature that emerged in the first quarter century of the life of the college. The language of instruction was English and Urdu was not taught in the college well into 1890, fifteen years after the college had been founded. The students were taught about English poets, English literature and about the history of England; Urdu literature, such an important component of the Hindustani Muslims cultural milieu, was not taught. Half the questions in the history exam were concerned with the history of England, and only a quarter with India, and that too largely with British India.<sup>66</sup> The Muslim *qaum*, for whom the college had been set up, would not have recognised much of its own past or tradition being taught in its own college.<sup>67</sup>

As Lelleveld argues, 'cut off from the cultural milieu of their father's generation, Aligarh students now came in contact with an adult life as mediated by their teachers, especially the British ones.... They [the teachers] bluntly criticized the culture and morality of their parents'

<sup>65</sup> David Lelleveld, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>67</sup> Looking through numerous issues of the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, one fails to find any mention of the many symbols and markers that would normally have been part of the north Indian Muslims being. There is not a single mention of Ghalib, Mir, Sauda, in the speeches reported in the *Gazette* made at the Siddons Union Club, or elsewhere. In many ways, the New Aligarh Man seems to have been plucked from his environment and planted in completely new surroundings.

generation... [and] communicated to the students the reality of British domination'.<sup>68</sup> He continues: 'dirt, dissipation, dishonest and cowardice (were shown as) characteristics of the previous generation of Indian Muslims. Students were lectured on the 'appalling evils of Oriental society', 'the ignorant and bigoted mullas', 'the intellectual poverty of this country', 'the natural indolence of the East'. 'The creation of this College' Theodore Morrison principal of the College told them, 'is the one noteworthy thing that the Muslims of India have done for some time'.<sup>69</sup>

Following Syed Ahmad's political strategy articulated since 1857, that of complete loyalty to the British, the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College continued with inculcating the same sense of loyalty in its graduates: 'It was an axiom of the Aligarh party line that only in the context of British-Muslim friendship and complete 'loyalty' to British rule could Muslims hope to improve their position in Indian society'.<sup>70</sup> The Union Club, the college's debating society stated clearly as part of its rules, that 'no matter shall be discussed which raises the question of the permanence or stability of the British Rule, nor any subject which involves the necessity of speakers ... taking up a disloyal or seditious attitude towards the British Government in its internal policy or external relations'.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, Syed Ahmad had succeeded in creating a class of subjects who were indeed 'English in tastes, in opinions and intellect'.<sup>72</sup> A 'heavy dose of loyalty to the Raj and the benefits of British rule was certainly a feature of Aligarh's ethos'.<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Jones argues that

<sup>68</sup> David Lelleveld, op. cit, p 277.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> These English 'opinions and intellect' and this world view, were created, strengthened and passed on not only through the principals of the College, who along with Syed Ahmad Khan, had a very strong imprint on the product of the College, but by more subtle means as well. The *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, the bi-weekly bi-lingual organ of the College carried press reports and news from other newspapers but almost always relied exclusively for its news coverage in English on the very loyal Anglo-Indian owned and managed *Pioneer*, from Allahabad, as well as on the *Englishman* from Calcutta. Also, at a later stage when the Indian National Congress came into being, newspapers sympathetic to the Congress were banned from the Union reading room, as they were bound to have created a sense of 'disloyalty' and an atmosphere of sedition.

<sup>73</sup> Katherine Watt, 'Thomas Arnold and the Re-evaluation of Islam', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 36, No 1, 2002, p. 74.



Theodore Beck the most important principal at Aligarh for many decades, felt that 'Aligarh graduates should be an Indian version of the educated gentry of England', something with which Syed Ahmad Khan would not have disagreed with. For Wilfred Cantrell Smith, the college 'was pro-British through and through.... It was... distinguishable from a Christian missionary college only by substitution of Islam for Christianity as the religious extra'.<sup>74</sup> Jones continues, that 'this approach did not lead to intellectual and academic excellence' at Aligarh as was demonstrated by 'its uninspiring record in the annual university examinations'.<sup>75</sup>

What was absent from the understanding and education of the Aligarh Man, was the centrality of Islam, which formed his and his ancestor's cultural, social and political sensibility. While prayers were made compulsory for all residents at Aligarh, theology and Islamic learning were not taken too seriously. At a farewell meeting on 12 April 1886, for four students going to England for higher studies, numerous students and members of the faculty addressed the gathering at the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College. Ahmad Hussain Khan, a senior student who had learnt his 'alphabet at the madrassa', and now captain of the cricket team and a student of MA in Philosophy was the last speaker to end the meeting. He ended his speech with the following words: 'I have made a principle of winding up my speeches on such occasions with a prayer for the long life of our grand old man the Honourable Syed. Perhaps some of my audience possessed of a high philosophic mind may have no faith in the efficacy of prayer and they may say that it means the Almighty Providence works by fits and starts, but as I have not yet reached such a state of scepticism, and as I still believe in the efficacy of prayers, I conclude my speech with a prayer for the long life of the Founder of this College'.<sup>76</sup> As Lelleveld argues, 'notably absent from the Muslim politics of Aligarh [was] Islam'.<sup>77</sup> This was particularly so, when the students of Aligarh had amongst their faculty, two renowned scholars of Islam T W Arnold and Maulana Shibli Naumani, 'neither of them had

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<sup>74</sup> Wilfred Cantrell Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* (Lahore: Ashraf, 1946), p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Kenneth Jones, *Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*, The New Cambridge History of India, 3.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 68.

<sup>76</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 1 May 1886.

<sup>77</sup> David Lelleveld, *op.cit.*, p. 341.

the opportunity to teach in class the subject of their scholarly research, Islamic history'.<sup>78</sup>

On the same theme, Peter Hardy argues that, 'the boys at Aligarh were not exhorted to an unhealthy anxiety about the fate of their souls, or indeed to an individual investigation of God's demands upon them in their modern world', and does add that 'Islam for them was a matter of cultural rather than religious conviction', but does go on to say that, 'whatever the founders real intentions, Aligarh became an institution for coming to terms with the British-created world on a footing of equality, rather than for questioning the world from burning religious conviction'.<sup>79</sup> What Aligarh did, for Hardy, 'was to produce a class of Muslim leaders with a footing in both Western and Islamic culture, at ease both in British and Muslim society and endowed with a consciousness of their claims to the aristocracy of the country as much in British as in Mughal times'.<sup>80</sup> For SAA Rizvi, who paints a rather unsympathetic and critical picture of Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh College, the students lived at their college in 'idle elegance, willingly supported by their families', and 'most of them detested the compulsory theology classes and prayers; only a negligible number took an interest in them'.<sup>81</sup> Thomas Arnold, himself a scholar of Islam at the college felt that 'insufficient emphasis was given to the history, languages and literatures of Islam, and called for greater efforts to bridge the growing gulf between English-educated Muslims and representatives of traditional Islamic learning'.<sup>82</sup> Theodore Morrison former principal of the college at Aligarh added that, 'I cannot help recognising that a large number of English-educated Mohammedans, incontestable as are their merits in other directions, are indifferent to religion, and many of them have no faith at all. This is an acknowledged evil which is growing with the spread of English education'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 103.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>81</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, 'The Breakdown of Traditional Society', in P.M. Holt, *et.al.* (eds.), *Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 88-9.

<sup>82</sup> Katherine Watt, 'Thomas Arnold and the Re-evaluation of Islam', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 36, No 1, 2002, p. 52.

<sup>83</sup> Theodore Morrison, *The History of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, from Its Foundation to the Year 1903*, p. 31.

Moreover, since the purpose of the Aligarh College was to produce graduates who would be able to get government jobs or work in and around the law courts – on both counts the College was very successful in this endeavour – and hence, since it was not ever meant to be a place of scholarship and learning (in the traditional as well as the Islamic sense of the term), in this early period Aligarh never produced a community of scholars or any volume of work which could be adjudged to be of scholarly merit or of learning. The focus was simply on producing employable men. Even Thomas Arnold, recognised this rather dullness in the curriculum of Indian colleges including Aligarh where there was too great an emphasis on the need simply to pass exams to get government service. He felt that this training was ‘insufficient to develop intellectual capacity and outlook’ and writing in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, felt that ‘some further agency is needed to foster an intellectual life and raise the minds of our students to some nobler aim than passing an examination, which most of them look upon as their goal of their education’.<sup>84</sup> The quest for knowledge and understanding, not simply the pursuit of a government job, which was so much part of earlier Muslim and Islamic education and learning tradition and culture, was lost to the New Man trained at Aligarh.<sup>85</sup> Arnold had felt that there was a ‘lack of culture and narrow emphasis both among students and in the curriculum’ at Aligarh.<sup>86</sup> Shibli Naumani, the other scholar of Islam at Aligarh who eventually set up the *Nadwat ul uloom*, an institution meant principally for the *ulema*, at Lucknow in 1894, shared similar feelings to Arnold. Katherine Watt argues that he ‘believed that a solely English education produced students of little worth and criticised Aligarh’s failure to instil traditional Muslim values and religious ideals in its students. He believed that the college was failing dismally to achieve a synthesis of Islamic and European knowledge and that Syed Ahmad Khan was betraying his original vision by increasingly lauding all things British at the expense of his own culture and history. Like Arnold, he criticized the focus of the curriculum and many students on the material goal of government service without a higher educational, religious, national or moral ideas’.<sup>87</sup> As a result, for many later day critics, ‘Aligarh turned out to be mainly

<sup>84</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 14 July 1891.

<sup>85</sup> For Thomas Arnold’s frustration and eventual failure in trying to make Aligarh a centre of learning and where a community of scholars could exist and conduct research, see Katherine Watt, ‘Thomas Arnold and the Re-evaluation of Islam’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 36, No 1, 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Katherine Watt, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

an educational ‘factory’ which manufactured graduates to run the British administration’.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps Akbar Allahbadi’s sardonic couplet best illustrates this view:

*Taleem jo di jati hai hamain, voh kya hai, faqat bazaari hai*  
*Jo aqal sikhai jati hai, voh kya hai, faqat sarkari hai*

(Loosely translated: the education that is given to us, is merely base/commodified; the knowledge/understanding which we are taught, is merely official/governmental)

### **The *qaum* and its multiple representations**

Throughout the nineteenth century and in particular after 1860, the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan alone, leave alone across India as a whole, was highly fragmented and divided across theological and ideological lines. With so many contesting claimants to represent the *qaum*, or some section of it, it becomes difficult to talk about the Muslim *qaum* across India or Hindustan. While most Muslim and Islamic leaders did exactly that, and claimed to speak for, address and represent the *qaum*, the contestation and divide between each grew.

Most Islamic groups or revivalist and reformist movements in northern India in the nineteenth century, usually trace their genealogy to Shah Waliullah (1703-63) who was the son of Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1644-1718) the founder of the *madrassah-i-rahimya* in Delhi.<sup>89</sup> It was Shaikh Abdul Aziz (1746-1824), Waliullah’s son, who is better known for his 1803 *fatwa* calling Hindustan a *darul harb*, the abode of the infidels, and justifying *jihad* under the British, which later lead to the Wahabi movement. Abdul Aziz’s daughter’s son, Muhammad Ishaq (1778-1846) was the next line of this tradition and when he left Delhi to travel overseas he constituted a board of four persons in his place, which had Maulana Mamluk Ali as its ‘chairman’.<sup>90</sup> Maulvi Mamluk Ali was the teacher of both, Maulana Qasim Nanatwi (1833-77) and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905), the founders of the Deoband *darul uloom*, while Syed Ahmad Khan was a disciple of Maulvi Mamluk Ali.<sup>91</sup> Hence, the founders of both Deoband and Aligarh traced their own

<sup>88</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, London, 1963, p. 37.

<sup>89</sup> This and the next three paragraphs, are drawn largely from Kenneth Jones, *op.cit.*, and from Syed Masroor Ali Akhtar Hashmi, *Muslim Response to Western Education: A Study of Four Pioneer Institutions* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1989).

<sup>90</sup> Syed Masroor Ali Akhtar Hashmi, *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27-8.

ideological and theological roots to the Waliullah tradition, but with differing consequences.

The Wahabi movement which traces its origins to the Shah Abdul Aziz *fatwa* of 1803, was led by Syed Ahmad Barelvi (1786-1831), who claimed to be a disciple of Shah Abdul Aziz, and founded his *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah* in Rae Bareilly, also accepted the basic writing of Shah Waliullah, but believed in the principle of *jihad*. He was killed fighting the British in Balakot in 1831, but his Wahabi movement continued for some decades later, at first maintaining its militancy against the British, but later becoming more of a proselytising force like the other Islamic groups that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Individuals from the Wahabi sect were responsible for the assassination of the Chief Justice of Bengal, John Paxton Norman in 1871, as well as in the same year, that of the Viceroy Lord Mayo on a visit to the Andaman Islands.<sup>92</sup> Five sets of state trials were held against Wahabi's and the movement between 1864-71, while their military power had been destroyed by 1863. Kenneth Jones writes that the movement led by Syed Ahmad Barelvi 'aimed at restoring Islam to political dominance through the use of force and drew upon all Muslims for support' and promised a restored and purified vision of Islam with egalitarianism. The 'failure of Syed Ahmad Barelvi's military campaign and of the Mutiny turned Muslims away from the use of military means to restore Islam to its proper place and from attempts to uplift the entire community. During the remainder of the nineteenth century movements of reform focussed on the ulema and ashraf Muslims of the upper classes'.<sup>93</sup>

The *Ahle-Hadith* emerged from the traditions of the formally militant *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah*, led by Syed Nasir (d. 1902). They too, like most reform movements of the nineteenth century accepted the teachings of Shah Waliullah, 'but were more uncompromising in their ideas. They rejected Sufism and with it a variety of rituals and ceremonies associated with saintly shrines, including the pilgrimage to the grave of Muhammad'.<sup>94</sup> The *Ahle-Hadith*, made inroads into the 'literate elite and ashraf' and 'spread their vision of renewed Islam through publications, learned teachers and formal debates. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the *Ahle-Hadith* comprised an

<sup>92</sup> Ram Gopal, *op.cit.*, 1959, p. 24. NB: It is quite astonishing that in this book on Indian Muslims, there is not a single mention of the Deoband seminary and movement, *at all*.

<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Jones, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

effective voice in debate both within the Islamic community and without,<sup>95</sup> and the disputes between the *Ahle-Hadith* and the Deobandis were 'particularly intense'.<sup>96</sup>

The *Ahle-Hadith*, Wahabis and Deobandis (on which more below), were three of the main Sunni sects proselytising and representing sections amongst the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan, and while all opposed the modernising and westernising tendencies of Aligarh and Syed Ahmad Khan – with whom they engaged in numerous theological debates on the finer slivers of religion – there was also another group of *ulema*, whom Kenneth Jones calls, 'perhaps the most uncompromising of all... led by Mawlana Ahmed Riza Khan'.<sup>97</sup> Jones calls the Barelwi *ulema* 'polar opposites' to the modernist school, who 'defended contemporary religion from criticism from within and beyond the community'.<sup>98</sup> Maulana Riza Khan 'entered into controversies with the *Ahle Hadith* and Deobandis. For him, they were the greatest danger to Islam. He wrote condemning their ideas and made fun of their programmes. He labelled them kafirs and Wahabis',<sup>99</sup> and also incessantly attacked Shias for being un-Islamic, as did the Deobandis and the *Ahle Hadith*. The Barelwi movement was 'orthodox and defensive', and they rejected 'those who would reinterpret Islam or who wanted to challenge the existing religious status quo... they rejected political action', and felt that 'politics was a distraction from the demands of a truly religious life'.<sup>100</sup> Their main support came from rural areas and amongst the uneducated, 'with a small sprinkling of government servants', and their main opponents remained Islamic movements of return that condemned many of the customs defended by the Barelwis'.<sup>101</sup> If there was one element at all common to an otherwise divisive and diverse Muslim religious grouping, it was probably its united position on what Syed Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh school was preaching and propagating. Iqtidar Alam Khan writes that, 'on an ideological plane, the theologians representing a wide spectrum of Islamic tendencies joined forces with the *Ahle Hadis* in rejecting Western culture and learning in all its forms. From... Deoband... they firmly

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>96</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 'Nationalist Muslims in British India: The Case of Hakim Ajmal Khan', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 19, No 1, 1985, p. 14.

<sup>97</sup> Kenneth Jones., p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

opposed Sir Saiyed Ahmad Khan's efforts to promote enlightenment and modern education among Muslims. They also scornfully rejected the loyalist political agenda of the Aligarh Movement...'.<sup>102</sup> The three main groups of Sunni ulama, viz., Deobandis, Barelwis and the *Ahle-Hadith*, 'thought of themselves as rivals, both intellectually and socially'.<sup>103</sup>

If there had to be an 'other' to the Aligarh Muslim in northern India, it probably was the Deoband Muslim. However, unlike a very obvious and visible 'other', the Deoband Muslim seems to be either invisible to the Aligarh Muslim or then for the most part, consciously ignored in the developmental process of each other.<sup>104</sup> This does not mean that there was no communication between both schools, but rather, that the level and degree of engagement suggested a mutual disinterest and distance.<sup>105</sup> Both within their own cocoons and enclaves and within their own catchment areas or constituencies (in terms of social groups rather than geographical regions), consolidated their own positions, constituencies and enclaves. Within the North Western Provinces, in districts not too far from one another, two versions of the Hindustani Muslim *qaum* emerged and consolidated its position, each claiming a voice on behalf of the larger *qaum*.

In most ways, the ulema and tradition of Deoband, was the complete antithesis of that of the founders and beneficiaries of Aligarh.<sup>106</sup> The Deoband *darul uloom* taught in Urdu and Arabic, never in English; unlike Aligarh, it had very humble beginnings and not the fanfare or pre-history as did Aligarh – the first pupil at Deoband began his lessons under a tree; Aligarh was thought of as, and continued to represent, a very loyal Muslim, while the loyalties of Deoband and its

<sup>102</sup> Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'Anti-Colonial Resistance and the *Jihad* Movement of Nineteenth Century India', *War and Peace in Islam* (New Delhi: Delhi Policy Group, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982, p. 313. This rivalry was not limited to northern India alone; as Rafiuddin Ahmed shows for Bengal, the sectarian conflicts within the Bengali Muslim community involved Sunni against Sunni. These reform movements, 'caused dissensions within the ranks of the Muslim divines, as well as among the public and gave rise to a state of confrontation in the society'. See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Metcalf states that the 'activities [of the ulama] were relatively inconspicuous'; see *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>105</sup> See particularly, the exchange of letters between Syed Ahmad Khan and Maulana Qasim Nanatvi in *Tasfiyat al-'Aqaid*, Deoband, Zia Press, not dated.

<sup>106</sup> Much of this section on the Deoband *darul uloom*, and on its politics, draws from Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *op.cit.*, and Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982.

*ulema* were certainly not with the British, and in fact they were openly anti-British; unlike Aligarh, the Deoband school was not dependent on British largesse or contributions for it to exist or survive and in no way relied on government patronage; and yet, in the early twentieth century, both Deoband and Aligarh switched sides: the modernised, secular Aligarh becoming 'Muslim' in its politics, while Deoband, reverting to a larger and more inclusive notion of nationalism and national politics.

Unlike the practical, political and ideological justifications made by Syed Ahmad and the Aligarh school in supporting the British in India and their attempts to be 'loyal Mohammadans' after 1857, the Deoband school traced a very different genealogy. While Syed Ahmad was busy rescuing and defending English officials and non-officials when he was at Meerut during the rioting of 1857, the founders of the Deoband *darul uloom* are said to have fought the British at that time. Faruqi writes that the 'founders of the Dar-ul uloom Deoband actively participated in the Rebellion, organized the masses outside Delhi and for a while were successful in ousting the British authority from the area they were working in. Nanatwi was the Commander of the forces, Gangohi the qadi'.<sup>107</sup> Hashmi too adds, that while Syed Ahmad Khan had supported the British in their 'hour of distress', the founders of the *darul uloom* 'had played an active role in the uprising', and that they 'were no common rebels' being trained in the Waliullah school of thought.<sup>108</sup> Syed Ahmad Khan, for his part, had denounced those who had called 1857 a *jihad* by calling them 'low-based pseudo Maulvis' who 'were merely ignorant and besotted scoundrels'.<sup>109</sup> (However, it also needs to be stated that there is considerable controversy over the claim that the founders of Deoband actually participated in the Rebellion. Barbara Metcalf has argued that this was not the case and that this role of the founders' was conceived at a later date when the biography of the founders' were being written).<sup>110</sup>

This controversy notwithstanding, it is still probably true as Faruqi points out, that the 'founders of the Dar-ul ulum Deoband represented the rebellious spirit of the disgruntled Muslims who, since the days of the Faridiya movement (1804), had been manifesting their uneasiness and dissatisfaction in one way or another, with the state of affairs created by the establishment and perpetuation of a foreign rule in

<sup>107</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>108</sup> Syed Mansoor Ali Hashmi, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>109</sup> In the *Loyal Mohammadans of India, Part*, p 11, quoted in M.S. Jain, *The Aligarh Movement*, Agra, 1965, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> See Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982.



India. They were not going to surrender before the resultant sufferings after their failure in 1857 and recoil into a fatal inactivity'.<sup>111</sup> In complete contrast to Syed Ahmad Khan's vision and politics, the Deoband *ulema* 'were fully conscious of the fact that the British rule, now more powerful than before, was not going to help them in their efforts to live up to the standards of their religious and cultural heritage'.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, by rejecting all things English, especially the language, the Deoband *ulema* knew that their graduates would not find government employment or government patronage, and so had to cultivate a completely different sense of being in this section of the Hindustani Muslim *qaum*.

It was not just Syed Ahmad's very openly pro-British political position which created many enemies within the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan or his anglicised westernising education project which aggravated matters, but more importantly, and prior to his Aligarh phase, there was also the question of his highly unorthodox and unconventional interpretation of the tenets of Islam. His 'orthodoxy amounted to heresy. The ulama and the orthodox north Indian threw up a massive barrage of opposition to Syed Ahmad's new approach to Islam. Indeed, for the indigent alim of Firangi Mahal, Maulvi Abdul Hai, denounced him as a follower of satan, while in 'every town and village fatwas were issued by the Maulwis which declared him to be a kafir'.... Special newspapers were founded to restrict Syed Ahmad's dangerous heterodoxy'.<sup>113</sup> Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanatwi, the founder of the seminary at Deoband, in particular, played an important role 'in discrediting Syed Ahmad Khan's doctrines among the traditionally educated' and wrote his *Tasfiyya al-Aqvail* and *Taqrir-i Dil-Pazir*, precisely for this purpose.<sup>114</sup> Rizvi argues that 'the traditional theologians strongly opposed the modernism of Syed Ahmad Khan and his associates... [and] they found the pseudo-intellectual fads of the westernized Muslims unsound and risky'.<sup>115</sup> Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, who took over the *darul uloom* after Maulana Nanatwi's death, who was also strongly opposed to Syed Ahmad's theological views, issued a *fatwa* against him warning Muslims not to associate with the activities of Syed Ahmad Khan.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>113</sup> Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 109.

<sup>114</sup> Peter Hardy, *op.cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>115</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>116</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

While theological differences and fineities were one, and probably not the most important, difference between Deoband and Syed Ahmad, political differences continued to divide sections of the Muslim *qaum*. In particular, it was the very different stands that both took on a relationship with the Indian National Congress after 1885. While Syed Ahmad vigorously opposed Muslims joining the Congress, Maulana Gangohi issued a *fatwa* saying that in 'worldly matters cooperation with the Hindus was permissible provided it did not violate any basic principle of Islam'.<sup>117</sup>

Much of the literature produced in Urdu between 1860-1900 in the North Western Province and Oudh, as gleaned from *Reports on the Vernacular Newspapers and Periodicals Published in the North West Provinces* and from the government's quarterly *Statement of Particulars Regarding Books, Maps & c., Published in the North-Western Provinces, and Registered Under Act XXV. Of 1867*, concerned either religious writing or poetry, but far more of the former than of the latter. Much of this was Muslim religious work such as commentaries on the Quran or some aspect of interpretation of some Islamic tenet or principle. In 1877, some seventy per cent of all works registered in the government's annual catalogue for the North-Western Province and Oudh, was classified as religious and was by Muslims.<sup>118</sup> In addition, writes Metcalf, 'there were biographies of saints and ulama, accounts of Islamic history, and diaries of pilgrimage classified by the government under such headings as biography and travel, but clearly to the pious works primarily religious'.<sup>119</sup> In 1871, she reports that 23,000 copies of the Quran or parts of it were published in that one year. At a time when the literacy level, even in the 'vernacular' was next to nothing, it is clear that a religious debate between different schools of thought was fairly active, in what Metcalf calls 'the pamphlet wars of the late nineteenth century'.<sup>120</sup> One pamphlet from Maulana Qasim Nanatwi, 'triggered off no fewer than nine responses from the Barelwi group of ulama and was reprinted many times'.<sup>121</sup>

Examples abound of religious tracts in Urdu which talk about, and usually begin with statements like: 'What I intend to say is that, at

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, However, it is important to point out that Metcalf contests this claim and says that Maulana Gangohi 'issued fatwas that discouraged social and business intercourse with Hindus'; see Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982, p. 152.

<sup>118</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *ibid.*, 1982, p. 202.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

the moment, in the world of Islam, I see a fight/disagreement/controversy [*fasaad*], which is pointless, but where everyone has become each other's life enemy [*jaani dushman*]. Someone says that he is a Wahabi and is the enemy of the prophet, someone says that some do not believe in God.... On account of this, in every single town and hamlet, nay, in every single *bazaar* and tiny settlement, everyone distrusts the other and vilifies them.... That is why, on the request of some people, I am writing this [pamphlet] so that this conflict amongst people of Islam [*ahle Islam*] is resolved'.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps there may have been real and substantial differences, as opposed to imagined ones, between different sects, but just one of numerous examples will show the extent of trivial differences that had led to major divides between the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan. Maulvi Muhammad Kasim Ali wrote a pamphlet which in English translates to; 'The safe handle for uttering 'Amin' in a low voice', of which 500 copies were printed in Mooradabad, December 1886.<sup>123</sup> The *Statement of Particulars Regarding Books, Maps & c., Published in the North-Western Provinces, and Registered Under Act XXV of 186, During the First Quarter of 1887* states: 'This is a work on the modern controversy which has arisen amongst the Muhammadans as to whether the word 'Amen' should be uttered in a loud or in a low voice at the conclusion of the prayers. According to the tenet of Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi, and Hanbal, the word 'Amen' should be uttered in a low voice.... According to the modern sect of the Wahabis the word 'Amen' should be uttered in a loud voice, *this difference of opinion has led to frequent disputes amongst the Muhammadans*'.<sup>124</sup> The fact that these differences between different sects amongst the Muslims were frequent and actively debated, can be gauged from the fact that in 1869, when the literacy level of the Muslims in the North West Provinces and Oudh was perhaps less than three per cent, and where most publications of any nature were lucky to have, at best, a few hundred copies printed, as many as 2,000

<sup>122</sup> Muhammad Amir, *Anwaar-e Muhammadi*, Lucknow, September 1875. This is a 137 page pamphlet which is 'a controversial treatise in defence of the orthodox Muslim religion, showing the difference of doctrine, tradition and ceremonial observances amongst the Sufis, the Wahabis, and other sects', James Fuller Blumhardt, *Catalogue of Urdu books in the India Office Library, 1800-1920* (supplementary to James Fuller Blumhardt's catalogue of 1900)/ compiled by Salim Al-din Quraishi, 1991, p. 221.

<sup>123</sup> The exact title of the tract is: '*Urwat-ul-waska fit Tamin bil Ikhfa*'. The title is in Arabic but the pamphlet is in Urdu.

<sup>124</sup> *Statement of Particulars Regarding Books, Maps & c., Published in the North-Western Provinces, and Registered Under Act XXV of 186, During the First Quarter of 1887*, p. 29; emphasis added.

copies of a pamphlet were published from Shahjehanpur, with the title *Raddi Rawafiz*, which 'refuted' the maxims of the Shia sect.<sup>125</sup> Clearly, there was a vibrant public which was involved in or concerned with keeping the divide amongst the Muslim *qaum* alive.

Another example demonstrates the extent of animosity between factions of the representatives of the Muslim *qaum*. Kenneth Jones gives the example of a debate between Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiya or Qadiani movement – from the place where he was located, at Qadian, in the Punjab – in September 1891 and a 'distinguished leader' of the *Ahle Hadith*, in Delhi outside the Jama Masjid, which turned into a confrontation and 'culminated in a near riot, a fairly common occurrence', which was based on 'extremely bitter personal and theological' differences amongst groups which claimed to represent the Hindustani Muslim *qaum*, amplifies the extent of the divisions and factions within the *qaum*.<sup>126</sup> Barbara Metcalf points out that Hakim Ajmal Khan in a meeting in 1909 'declared that there had been more mutual denunciations of infidelity (fatwa-yi takfir) in India since 1857 than there had been previously in the whole history of Islam'.<sup>127</sup>

Clearly, the Muslim *qaum* in Hindustan, was fractured by sect, with different groups and sects fighting and arguing with each other over real and imagined differences. In her study on Deoband, Barbara Metcalf argues that, 'debate [between different sects] was intense and often bitter', and that there was conflict over the leadership of the Muslims; quoting Sandra Freitag, Metcalf argues that the 'impetus to communal riots was often to be found in competition for power among coreligionists engaged in rivalry for internal leadership of a community'.<sup>128</sup> Yet, she sees this conflict as positive, where through this 'competition' each group found its own beliefs being strengthened and revitalised. It is difficult to talk about just one, united or unifying, Muslim *qaum* in northern India after the 1860s, when the reform and revivalist movements in subcontinental Islam – Islam in the 'Indian environment', as Aziz Ahmad has called it – had established themselves, each, or some of them at least, trying to represent the *qaum*.

<sup>125</sup> *Statement of Particulars Regarding Books, Maps & c., Published in the North-Western Provinces, and Registered Under Act XXV of 186, During the First Quarter of 1870*, p. 93.

<sup>126</sup> Kenneth Jones, *op.cit.*, p.117.

<sup>127</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1985, p. 15.

<sup>128</sup> Barbara Metcalf, *op.cit.*, 1982, p. 357.

Perhaps one should end this section by showing that it was not just the religious groups which were disunited and fractured where debate may have been intense and bitter, but also less-religious groups as well. The Mohameddan Literary Society set up by Abdul Latif Khan in Calcutta in April 1863, had a rival in the North-Western Provinces when Syed Ahmad Khan set up his Scientific Society at Ghazipur. Even in the small community of educated Muslims in Calcutta in the 1870s two factions had emerged, one supporting Abdul Latif and the other Nawab Amir Ali Khan, with the former being predominantly Sunni and the latter predominantly Shia. Mehrotra argues that 'the differences between the two factions came to a head in late 1876 over the question over the right attitude to be adopted towards the Sultan of Turkey in his current troubles with his Christian subjects and neighbours'.<sup>129</sup> As a result of these differences, in May 1878 the National Mohammedan Association was set up in Calcutta. After five years of its existence a committee of the National Mohammadan Association evaluated its own role and the conditions of the Muslim community more generally. It cited a number of factors which were responsible for the poor condition of the Muslims, which were 'combined with the apathy of its leading members, and the insidious attacks of some of their co-religionists, render[ing] impossible any united action on part of the Mohammedans'.<sup>130</sup>

### **The 'Indian' and the 'National' in the Congress**

During the 1870s and early 1880s, other Indians outside of 'Hindustan', began to express their opinions about social as well as political issues, including the manner of representation and about numerous laws pertaining to the Viceroy and his government in Calcutta. Sections of educated (many of them English-educated) Indians became more vocal and began to organise themselves in groups, organisations and associations. Much of the political activity that was taking place in the 'eighties, took place in Calcutta and Bombay, with the third presidency town Madras, and Poona also somewhat active. Many of the new Indian 'political' organisers were the English-educated elite based largely in these towns.

Most of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh seemed quiet politically, with Muslims in particular, all over India, not taking a very

<sup>129</sup> S.R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971), p.218.

<sup>130</sup> *Rules and Objects of the Central National Mohammedan Association and Its Branch Associations with the Quinquennial and Annual Reports and Lists of Members, 1885*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 219.

active public part in 'political' issues. Syed Ahmad Khan was talking about Muslim education and the development and welfare of all of Hindustan, while Syed Ameer Ali in Calcutta, petitioned government particularly with regard to jobs for Muslims.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, many of the social reform organisations of the Hindus and Muslims kept themselves separate and did not merge into one larger multi-religious organisation, since 'social' issues and customs were considered to be largely related to religion, and hence their uniqueness for each community. Karunkasan argues, that since social reform was being undertaken separately by each religious group, this led to the 'effect of creating separate organizations and further strengthening their separatist tendencies'.<sup>132</sup> The numerous religious reformist and revivalist movements of the time, underlined different notions of religious identity and solidarity, and probably helped further accentuate divisions amongst Hindus and Muslims. Political organisations, while not necessarily demarcated on religious lines may, nevertheless, have carried forward some of these biases which had been formed earlier.

During the latter half of 1885, Briton Martin gives an account of as many as five conferences, other than the best-known, held in India on what were emerging as political issues. There was one meeting at Jubbulpore, another, a small provincial meeting at Allahabad, of editors and with political actors concerned with issues relevant to the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. Three conferences were held at the end of December, with the second Madras Conference under the auspices of the Madras Mahajana Sabha being held in order to 'unite the proliferating Madras political groups in a common cause and action'; the second national conference at Calcutta of S N Bannerjea's British India Association, almost exclusively attended by Hindu zamindars; and a meeting of the Central National Mohammedan Association, 'the major Muslim political and social organisation at that time', which had developed links throughout the Muslim community of India.<sup>133</sup> The inaugural meeting of the Indian National Congress was also held in the last week of December 1885 in Bombay.

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<sup>131</sup> Much of this section is drawn from Briton Martin, *New India 1885* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), and particularly, S.R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971).

<sup>132</sup> K.P. Karunkasan, *Continuity and Change in Indian Politics: A Study of the Political and Philosophy of the Indian National Movement 1885-1912* (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1964), p. 23.

<sup>133</sup> Briton Martin, *op.cit.*, pp 283-90.

At the first meeting of the Indian National Congress, there were only two Muslims present, both members of the Bombay Municipal Corporation and of the Anjuman-i-Islam of Bombay City. The two well known Muslims from Bombay Camruddin and Badruddin Tyabji, who were supposed to attend, were called away for some urgent business to Cambay. There were no Muslim delegates from Bengal, Madras, the North-Western Provinces or the Punjab. Nevertheless, 'no aspiration was more warmly felt or keenly expressed during the Congress than that for national unity. It was a thread woven through the addresses of the key speakers and giving brilliant color to the proceedings from the start to the finish'.<sup>134</sup> Many speakers pointed out the blessings of British rule including 'English education and Western civilization', without which there would have existed no Indian unity, nor any sense of nationality. One of the speakers, Iyer, 'went so far as to say that a sense of national unity was a unique British characteristic, which it was the British mission to foster. 'For the first time' in Indian history, he emphasised, 'the phenomenon of national unity and a sense of national existence' were at work within the divided, fissile, Indian population thanks to British rule'.<sup>135</sup> This apparent sense and celebration of Indian national unity in 1885 seems a far cry from those days in the late 1870s when the Indian community, particularly in Calcutta – which was in many ways at the vanguard of the Indian National Congress and of numerous other associations and organisations – 'was notorious for its internecine state. Petty jealousies and hatreds presented the leading families of the town from co-operating with each other for any purpose whatsoever. There was hardly any individual or organization who could fairly claim to speak on behalf of the entire community'.<sup>136</sup>

While Syed Ahmad's Lucknow and Meerut lectures have been referred to above, they were just the initial outburst from the Aligarh establishment against the Indian National Congress meeting after Madras. The Bombay and Calcutta sessions went without much comment, but the Badruddin Tyabji Madras session provoked Syed Ahmad Khan to defend his under-threat leadership of India's Muslims and brought him right into the whirlpool of anti-Congress activity, so much so, that with Theodore Beck, he set up the very loyal, United Indian Patriotic Association against the Congress. While Syed Ahmad's two lectures and subsequent writing on the Congress argued why it was not in the interests of Muslims to join the Congress – largely that they

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>136</sup> S.R. Mehrotra, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

will lose their special protected privileges if there was open competition and representative government – and that there would be another mutiny in India on account of the radical politics of the Congress, he urged, Muslims to shun the politics of the Congress.

With Syed Ahmad writing and lecturing in Urdu, a series of pamphlets appeared in 1888, all in English, and all published by the Pioneer Press in Allahabad, which attempted to show the non-representational character of the National Congress and also argued on the lines that Syed Ahmad Khan had initiated. Syed Ahmad Khan had argued, point-by-point, about why the Congress was wrong about its demands to government, and much of the writing in north India took its queue from Syed Ahmad's writings and repeated his arguments in more or less the same words.

A one-hundred-and-four page, extremely articulate and highly sophisticated pamphlet, with the title *Democracy not suited to India*, was published under the name of Oday Pratap Singh, Rajput, the Raja of Bhinga, Oudh, by the Pioneer Press Allahabad, in 1888, in which the author had taken great pains to address all of Congress' claims and had shown why democracy was not a good model of governance for Indians.<sup>137</sup> This was not a pamphlet, unlike Syed Ahmad's two lectures in which Muslim interest were defended, but one in which far broader issues were addressed. It was addressed to the 'martial races of India in general, and my Rajput brothers in particular, to pause before they decide to take any part in the aforesaid movement, which if not confined to Bengal and Madras, cannot fail to end in misrule and anarchy'.<sup>138</sup> A key theme in the pamphlet is the unrepresentational nature of the Madras Congress.

The Raja shows that of the 607 delegates to the Madras Congress, '362 came from Madras, 99 from Bombay and Sindh, 79 from Bengal, Behar, Orissa and Assam, 45 from the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, 13 from the Central Provinces, and 9 from the Punjab'.<sup>139</sup> Quoting an 'excellent letter' to the *Times* from Uma Shankar Misra, a Deputy Collector, in the North-Western Provinces, the Raja quotes: 'for the Benares district two Bengalis and one Punjabi were delegated to Madras. Can any one in his senses believe that an insignificant Punjabi

<sup>137</sup> This is an extremely well-argued and well-written pamphlet and it is rumoured that Sir John Strachey was either the author or had a hand in writing it.

<sup>138</sup> Raja of Bhinga, *Democracy not suited to India* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1888), p. i.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.



editor of a penny paper or a couple of Bengali pleaders can represent a district with throes of war like Rajputs and Brahmins?', and states that the case with Allahabad district was 'similar'.<sup>140</sup> The Raja takes a great deal of trouble of going through the full list of the representatives for the North-Western Provinces showing that some were journalists, some pleaders and some Bengalis. Quoting the pro-British *Pioneer*, the Raja shows that 'the North-West was represented at Madras by 8 journalists, 17 pleaders, 2 barristers, 3 educational officers, 5 zemindars, 4 men of business and 5 miscellaneous persons, and out of the total of 44, 11, to judge by their names, seem to have been Bengalis. Thus the national representatives of a great Province – of what we call Hindustan Proper – comes down to a batch of persons of whom over half are pleaders and editors and a quarter of them strangers repudiated equally by Mahomedan and Hindu'.<sup>141</sup>

The Raja of Bhinga a Rajput and member of the largely Hindu Oudh Talukdars' Association – which, he informs us 'unanimously resolved' not to join the National Congress – takes innumerable pains to go through the lists of representatives at Madras to prove that Muslims were a small number present and that Muslims did not support the Congress. He provides extensive details and makes numerous calculations to show the under-representation of Muslims at Madras. Quoting the Third Congress Report he questions the claim made in the Report that 'the bulk of the intelligent Mohammedans all over the country did join and join heartily', by stating that 'the assertion that the Mohammedans were favourably disposed towards the Congress had no support at the time, and has been conclusively disproved'.<sup>142</sup> He then uses the data provided in the Congress Report which shows that 'about 80 of the 604 delegates were Musalmans, 58 from Madras, 9 Bombay and Sindh, 1 Punjab, 7 North-Western Provinces and Oudh, 3 Central Provinces, and 1 Bengal', and continues that 'the entire Mohammedan community outside Madras was represented by 21 persons as against 224 non-Musalman delegates'.<sup>143</sup> The Raja of Bhinga goes through a province-by-province analysis of showing the Madras representation of Muslims against their share in the actual population of the province, and argues, for example, that while half the population of Bengal is Muslim, only one out of 78 representatives at Madras from Bengal was Muslim. Moreover, while some Muslims did address the Congress, the Raja

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

dismisses this and argues that, 'not one of the Mohammedan speakers at the Congress could pretend to the smallest political influence among his fellow-countrymen, and only four or five of the Mohammedans made any speeches at all'.<sup>144</sup>

All this information about representation is to be found in the very first of the four chapters of the Raja's pamphlet. The other three look at the constitution of the National Congress, its proposals, and its objects and methods. The Raja quotes John Mill's *Representative Government* at length and approvingly, showing why the application of democratic principles of India is unsuited to her.

A second pamphlet published by the Pioneer Press and also in 1888, is a collection of six of Theodore Beck's articles, four of which were earlier published in the *Pioneer* newspaper and deal with various issues, are brought together under the title *Essays on Indian Topics*.<sup>145</sup> Two of these articles, both previously published in the *Pioneer* and reproduced in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* are on the Indian National Congress published first in November 1887. A third pamphlet published by the Pioneer Press and by a press in London simultaneously, also in 1888, is the very extensive second pamphlet issued by the United Indian Patriotic Association, of which Theodore Beck is the Honorary Editor.<sup>146</sup>

This pamphlet contains nine articles and speeches all dealing with some aspect of the Congress. The Introduction is by Beck, followed by excerpts from the Raja of Bhinga's earlier pamphlet. There is an article by Beck, English translation of letters and speeches by Munshi Imtiaz Ali, His Highness the Maharaja of Benares' speech at Patna at the Benares Institute, the letter by Syed Hosain Bilgrami, the Secretary of the Nizam of Hyderabad, a speech made by Mohamed Hosain Hakim in Bombay, an article by Syed Ahmad Khan, two leaders from the *Pioneer*, and an article entitled 'The Coming Mutiny in India', by Choudhri Nusrat Ali, the Assistant Secretary of the British India Association in Oudh. However, perhaps, the most interesting aspect of this pamphlet, are its Appendices.

The first Appendix gives the Rules of the United Indian Patriotic Association and gives the names of the members and donors of the Association. There are 109 members listed, sixteen of whom are Hindu,

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>145</sup> Theodore Beck, *Essays on Indian Topics* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1888).

<sup>146</sup> United Indian Patriotic Association, *Showing the Seditious Character of the Indian National Congress and the Opinions Held by Eminent Natives of India Who are Opposed to the Movement* (London: Trubner and Co.; Allahabad: the Pioneer Press, 1888).

most of the 109 being raises, talukdars, zemindars, collectors and government servants. This Appendix also lists the names of 53 'Muhamedan Associations [which] have been affiliated to the Patriotic Association', with a brief write-up about the affiliated associations and a statement of support to the Patriotic Association and a statement saying that they do not want to be part of the National Congress. The second Appendix is even more interesting, for it is a painstakingly put together collection of 'short accounts of some of the public meetings that have been held in different parts of India' against the Congress and some in support of the Patriotic Association, and the editor adds that unfortunately, they were not able to get the records of all such public meetings held, this collection includes a smaller number than those that actually took place. The Appendix is entitled: 'Public Meetings of the Hindus and Muhammadans held to Condemn the National Congress'.<sup>147</sup>

The Appendix lists twenty-one such meetings between the period February to November 1888, with sixteen taking place between August and November. There is a write-up on each meeting listing the names of the prominent people who attended and gives the size of the meetings. In Allahabad on 7 February 1888, 3,000 people gathered 'both Shia and Sunni', while there was an 'enormous open air meeting of Muslims' in Lucknow on 6 May 1888, in which it is estimated that 20,000 Muslims participated. There is a meeting in Benares where 'leading Pandits summoned the meeting', one in Bombay on 4 August 1888 in which 'the meeting decided that the Muhammadans of Bombay should hold aloof from the Congress'. There are meetings at Dacca, Etawa, Delhi, Ludhiana and at towns mainly in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. Many of them are attended by both Hindus and Muslims, but the majority listed are those attended by Muslims. Princes, Rajputs, and 'influentials' attended some of these meetings.

A meeting at Shahjehanpur on 30 August 1888 was 'a great meeting of Muhammadans ... All men of influence and Pathans of every clan inhabiting the country were present'. A meeting of 'Chief Priests' was held at Delhi on 23 September 1888, which was also 'a great meeting of all the maulvis of Delhi' with all the sects of the Muslims participating; this was attended by 5,000 Muslims at Fatehpuri mosque and 'one of the most influential and learned men alive in India', Maulvi Nazir Hosain, head of the *Ahle-Hadith* spoke to the congregation. Another meeting at Delhi on 5 October 1888, called 'a VERY important meeting of Muhammadans against the National Congress was held in the

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

Town Hall' in which 2,000 people attended and Nazir Ahmad delivered a lecture against the Congress.

Clearly, Theodore Beck went to a great deal of trouble to show that there was a raging anti-Congress movement in India, and certainly amongst the Muslims of the North-Western Provinces. All these meetings were not organised by the United India Patriotic Association, and hence show that there was some, if not considerable, resentment against the Congress. While there may not have as yet been any organised form of antipathy towards the Congress, it is clear that on account of the formation of the Congress, political consciousness was growing amongst the Muslims of northern India. It is also perhaps worth emphasising that in the pamphlets mentioned above and in the anti-Congress reports included in these pamphlets, there is no trace of an anti-Hindu communal stance. There is certainly a concern about Muslim sectional interests, and class interests of the zemindars and talukdars, but the discourse is far from 'communal'.

While the Aligarh establishment led by Beck and perhaps on the suggestion of Syed Ahmad, was active in its anti-Congress campaigns writing in English, it is necessary to point out that this campaign was not restricted to this active group alone, and there were scores of pamphlets written all over India, most by Muslims and importantly, all in Urdu, which warned against Muslims (and in many cases, Hindus) from joining the Congress. Hashim Shah Bukhari writing from Firozpur in 1888, in his pamphlet entitled *Muslims should beware of the National Congress*, states that 'the Muslims of Firozpur, like the Muslims of all the towns in the Punjab, consider the objectives of the National Congress as unfavourable for themselves, and for their mulk and for the government'.<sup>148</sup> Muhammad Shamsuddin Shaikh, delivered a lecture at Gurdaspur on 16 August 1888 (a thousand copies of which were eventually published) in opposition to the views of the Congress and stated that the Congress had been created by the 'English-educated Bengali baboos from Calcutta' and then goes on to give numerous reasons why his audience should not join the Congress.<sup>149</sup> Muhammad Shamsuddin Shaikh does not take an anti-Hindu position in his speech – attended by Syeds, Shaikhs, government servants and called a grand meeting [*alishaan jalsa*] – but based on their history, does state that Muslims are superior and better able to govern if ever the English left,

<sup>148</sup> Hashim Shah Bukhari, *National Congress say Musalmano ko bachna chahiyay*, Firozpur, 1888, emphasis added.

<sup>149</sup> Muhammad Shamsuddin Shaikh, *Ainah National Congress*, Gurdaspur, 1889.

although he insists that the English should stay on in Hindustan indefinitely. Another pamphlet written by an anonymous Muslim published from Allahabad in 1888 (500 copies) is an appeal to all Hindustanis not to join the National Congress about to take place in its fourth meeting, in Allahabad. The author addresses 'conscious and aware Muslims and knowledgeable and sensible Hindus'.<sup>150</sup>

(*Dipti*) Nazir Ahmad in a long lecture given in the Town Hall at Delhi on 15 October 1888, published from Agra later that year, gives a very detailed analysis of what is wrong with the Congress and why one, mainly Muslims, should oppose it. But, it is the Indian National Congress' claim, calling itself 'national' and 'Indian' which really irks him. He says that those who have set up the National Congress, have called it the Indian National Congress, and are just praising themselves [*apnay moon mian mithoo*], 'but even a school going child who knows Hindustan's geography and history, will be astonished to hear the name of Hindustan being used with the word national – where is Hindustan and where nationality? [*kuja Hindustan aur kuja nationality*]'.<sup>151</sup> He goes on to argue, that there is not a single country in the world which has, like Hindustan numerous and varied *qaums*, and hence it is a travesty to collect all these diverse *qaums* and call this a single *qaum*. He goes on and says that 'even if you consider all Muslims and all Hindus both each as a *qaum*, it is acceptable. But how can Muslims and Hindus combine into one *qaum* calling themselves Indian National?'.<sup>152</sup>

Any 'national movement' to address the civil service question, for example, ought to have mobilised far more Bengalis than any other group in colonial India. What was labelled as S N Bannerjea's 'triumphal progress' through various parts of India in connexion with the civil service agitation in 1877 'marks an epoch in the political history of the country' and he was the first Indian 'to tour the subcontinent on a purely political mission'.<sup>153</sup> The civil service agitation of 1877-9 'was the first instance of political agitation co-ordinated on an all-India basis by Indians themselves ... The leaders of the Indian Association ... set out deliberately to organize a 'national movement' on the civil service question'.<sup>154</sup> By creating a niche on the basis of sectional interests rather than on the basis of competition and merit – separate seats, job allocations, the consideration of Muslims as a separate entity – Muslims

<sup>150</sup> Anonymous, *Qaumi Nasihat*, Allahabad, 1888.

<sup>151</sup> Ahmad Nazir, *Lekhar dar mukhalafat i izhar va mazarrat*, Agra, 1888.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> S.R. Mehrotra, *op.cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

were being pampered and granted access to privileges which they would have lost had they supported the Congress, a genuine fear that was central to all of Syed Ahmad and Theodore Beck's pronouncements against the Congress. While there was some concern amongst Muslims from the North-Western Provinces and Oudh regarding 'suitable' government employment, the numbers of those affected or dissatisfied would have been far fewer, both in absolute terms and relatively, than the educated candidates in Bengal.

If indeed it was, and it seems very probable that this was the case, that it was English education and 'Western civilization' which was responsible for men from Bombay, Madras and especially Calcutta, getting together and becoming 'politicised' with a broader, all-India sense and consciousness, having an adequate appreciation of modern politics, then it is not surprising that Muslims in colonial India and the inhabitants of the less developed (in terms of English education and western civilization) North-Western Provinces, did not see or understand the need for such organisations and, therefore, remained largely outside the folds of such organisations. There seemed to be too few individuals with this background outside of the Presidency towns, to warrant them taking any action on such organisational lines. Perhaps even something as mundane as their inability to speak in a language – English – which others would have understood and in which they would have communicated their concerns, may have inhibited them from joining such 'national' organisations and limited their organisational efforts to more local, regional or provincial links. This was also more marked in the case of the Muslim *qaum*, whether in Hindustan or elsewhere. Hence given these largely structural and historical constraints, the lack of the representational nature of participation in the Indian National Congress or in organisations which were its antecedents, is not all that surprising.

In addition, another explanation for why Muslims in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, did not, and in fact, could not have, joined a Bengali-led and Bombay-led organisation, was on account of differences in cultural practice between the former and the latter two. The descendants of a recently demised courtly culture, those with experience, rather than merely the memories of an imagined golden age, having served with some of the descendants of the great Mughals or at the court of Oudh, still alive, having trained in a very different environment prior to the stamp of English authority, could not have understood or adapted to the new ways being propagated by this English-educated class. Moreover, the practice of doing business with the English amongst the Muslims, which was based on 'loyalty' and upon the beneficence of the English,

differed markedly from the new practices of conflict and 'radicalism' amongst this new class. While Syed Ahmad Khan's life's mission was to create the conditions and training which would allow Muslims to get jobs, Muslims (and Syed Ahmad's entire strategy of working with the English exemplifies this) preferred to work with their rulers, whosoever they may be – Muslim or non-Muslim – rather than to take on a confrontational posture. The entire new politics of the Bengali-led Indian National Congress was anathema to the more servile Muslim leaders.

Quite probably, the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, was the most important single event in India between 1857-1900. It was also the defining moment for not just Muslims in India in general, but particularly for the Muslims of Aligarh and all UP Muslims, since the politics of the UP Muslims quickly became the politics of the all-India Muslims.

### **Representing the *qaum***

How was it that the Aligarh well-born, those who had lost all sense of honour, being, livelihood and belonging, after the events of 1857, claimed the most eloquent and most vocal voice to represent the Hindustani Muslim *qaum* by the beginning of the twentieth century? How were they able to drown out the cacophony of clamour which came from other Muslim representations in northern India? Considering that Aligarh produced only 220 Muslim graduates between 1882 and 1902, far fewer than the 410 Muslim graduates produced by Allahabad University, how was it that a few hundred graduates with support amongst their larger community and social class, appropriated the right to speak in the name of the *qaum*?

Probably the most important reason for the Aligarh Muslims even existing in the form they did in the late nineteenth century, must be on account of the role played by Syed Ahmad Khan in taking them there. It is no exaggeration to state, that without Syed Ahmad, we would not have had the Aligarh Muslims in the form that they emerged in. While David Lellyveld correctly states that Syed Ahmad Khan had become the most prominent public man in north India by 1885, Ram Gopal finds that while the 'fame' of Syed Ahmad Khan 'overshadowed' that of Syed Ameer Ali in Calcutta, he finds that 'Ameer Ali's contribution to Muslim politics is more important and powerful'.<sup>155</sup> Gopal is probably wrong on this count as events from the beginning of the early twentieth century have proven, but even if there is some truth in his statement, it only accentuates the argument that we have been making here, that Muslim

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<sup>155</sup> Ram Gopal, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

politics and groups were fractured and there was little communication and bonhomie between them. It is Syed Ahmad's strong imprint which is most visible on the politics of Muslims in northern India in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Syed Ahmad Khan was able to emerge as the most respected and prominent Muslim in north India, largely by supporting the British consistently. While he had abundant intellectual abilities which were evident prior to 1857 even, and some of his most interesting essays and historical pieces are written then, it was his unflinching loyalty and servitude to the British which allowed him access and privilege amongst the British. His was a consistently stable policy of working with the British, never crossing swords, and always being servile to them, which allowed them to trust and work with him, to his and a section of the Muslim *qaum*'s great benefit. By very carefully and over a long period of time, developing the ability to be trusted and respected, Syed Ahmad found that his ability to acquire favour and beneficence from the British grew. The entire Aligarh project, in terms of funds and land for the building, in its earlier years, depended on Syed Ahmad Khan's personal relations with certain senior government officials. Without their largesse, the Aligarh College was a non-starter. Francis Robinson, in fact argues that, the 'Muslims formed with various landlord groups the twin pillars of British control in UP. As a result they received government patronage both official and unofficial, and without it, it is doubtful whether Aligarh College would have survived its early years, whether it would have grown so great or its leaders so influential'.<sup>156</sup> The realisation of a section of the Muslim *qaum*, one which became the most representational, was dependent on this relationship with the British.

Howsoever Syed Ahmad justified this servitude towards the British, it mattered not. At times, it was through some notion of Islamic understanding, that as long as Muslims felt protected by their ruler and that they were free to practice rituals belonging to their religion, they were obliged to support him and cannot raise the banner of *jihad* against him; hence, he argued, Muslims must support the British. He also at times, explained that the tradition of Muslims is to serve whoever the ruler happened to be, and so they would serve their existing masters. At other times it was by saying that Christians are 'the people of the book' and are therefore, in some ways similar to Muslims, especially when compared to the Hindus. Although Syed Ahmad Khan did not raise the

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<sup>156</sup> Francis Robinson, 'Nation Formation: the Brass Thesis and Muslim Separatism', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 25:3 (November 1977), p. 226.



communal anti-Hindu banner, he did try to distinguish between the Muslims and Hindus. As late as 1888 at Meerut when he spoke against the Congress and defined Muslim strategy regarding the political situation, he said quoting from the Quran, that 'God prohibits us from befriending those who are not of our religion [*ghair mazhab*], but we can befriend the Christians because they are people of the book [*ahle kitab*]. Our friendship, our affection, cannot be as much with those of another religion, as much with Christians'.<sup>157</sup> He adds, that 'as much as it is possible, we will be loyal [*wafadar*] to the English government'. There are countless examples of Syed Ahmad espousing the theme of loyalty to his co-religionists, especially at a time of apparent crisis, when the Indian National Congress had been formed.

It was the political position taken by Syed Ahmad very early on in his career, with which he persisted, that allowed a section of the Muslims to benefit from British rule in India. While the Muslim *qaum* led by Syed Ahmad were eager to have access to Imperial largess, the British too did cultivate certain Muslim interests by trying to improve their condition, especially with regard to education and jobs. It was a relationship which benefited both parties, and the Muslims proved their loyalty at the time the Congress began to flex its muscle. A section of the Muslims, led by Syed Ahmad, were always loyal enough to counter any claims that the Congress made about being the representative of all of India. The Muslims had gained a great deal from the largess of Imperial Britain and they were not going to allow these privileges to be replaced by competitive exams. They had to continue to protect their sectional interests, interests which affected only one section of the larger Hindustani Muslim *qaum*.

The success of the Aligarh Muslims over rival Muslim groups arose because, for one, they were accommodated by the British, as opposed to other groups, particularly religious ones. The British had preferred to keep out of religious affairs, leaving them to practice much as they chose. Even the militant Wahabis were initially free to preach, but once they became more organised and their activity more effectively targeted towards the British, the colonial authorities cracked down on this sect. Nevertheless, peaceful Wahabis were allowed to practice and follow their religious beliefs. There seems to be largely a 'hands off' policy regarding the developments of religious groups by the British, although they were probably monitored. The British had a 'softer corner'

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<sup>157</sup> *Indian National Congress pur Syed Ahmad Khan ka Lecture: Hamari qaum ko nisbat political amoor saltanat kay kya tariqa ikhtiar karna chahiyay?*, Meerut, 16 March 1888.

for many of the nawabs and members of numerous royal families and are said to have gotten along well with them, respecting them as long as they did not create trouble. They found the rajas and maharajas, cultured and less likely to create trouble.

There was also a class angle to why the Aligarh Muslims emerged as representatives of the Muslims in Hindustan. Just as Bengalis and some Bombay English-educated men began to benefit from 'Western civilization' and its consequences, so too, perhaps a generation or two later, did the Muslim English-educated elite. With enlightened views and by being more articulate than their Urdu, and especially Bengali-speaking co-religionists, the Aligarh graduates became representatives of a growing modern Muslim consciousness. They became more national and representational, than say the Deobandis or the Barelwis, who came from different social classes. Although, as we show above, Barbara Metcalf insists that the *ulema* of Deoband and of the *Ahle-Hadith*, came from the *ashraf*, both Peter Hardy and Paul Brass contest this claim. Brass argues that 'the ulama differed from the two other segments of the Muslim elite [he is talking about the Muslim aristocracy and middle class professionals] in class background ... Those ulama who were not simply sons of ulama tended to come from a peti-bourgeois background'.<sup>158</sup> Hardy argues that most were teachers in elementary schools, the lower middle class of a pre-industrial society, printers, lithographers, book sellers, teachers, retail shopkeepers, skilled craftsmen and petty zemindars.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, while Metcalf does insist that the founders of both groups came from the *ashraf* and well-born, their constituencies over a generation had shifted to somewhat lower classes. The ability to speak in English must also have been a factor for being accommodated into the charmed circles, something probably that the Barelwi or Deobandi maulanas may not have been apt at.

But there was also the aspirations and the desire to claim representation in the new rules being defined. The Aligarh Muslims were trained in a manner which made them comfortable in these new surroundings, and their entire policy of subservience and loyalty to the British, made them eager to join and be acceptable to the British who had no hesitation in cultivating them further. The British required representatives from the Muslim *qaum*, and the Aligarh modernists best met their requirements.

Even though Aligarh Muslims appropriated the voice of the Muslim 'nation', it needs to be remembered and highlighted that even

<sup>158</sup> Paul Brass, *op.cit.*, 1974, p. 163.

<sup>159</sup> Peter Hardy, *op.cit.*

amongst those who shared the broad enlightenment to which Syed Ahmad and his colleagues subscribed, there was considerable criticism of the methods used and the extent to which this section of the Muslim *qaum* went in trying to fulfil its aspirations. Amongst many, the voice of the turn-of-the-century satirical poet Akbar Alahabadi, for example, is representative of this section of the *qaum*. Akbar was himself a thoroughly liberal man for the times, and accepted the need for Muslims to acquire a modern outlook and modern education so that they could better themselves in the world availing of the new opportunities that had arisen. However, as Ralph Russell argues, 'he did not accept the view propagated by Sir Syed, that British interests and Muslim interests were identical, and that Muslims should make themselves into brown Englishmen in everything except religion. He saw that the British were concerned with their own interest and nobody else's, and that English education was, for them, mainly a means for producing the supply of junior administrative clerks which they needed to govern the country'.<sup>160</sup> Akbar feared that this blind adherence to the English educational model was beginning to produce 'a servile breed of people who blindly imitated the British master's ways, took an absurd pride in adopting them, and looked upon their own traditional culture as old fashioned and obsolete'.<sup>161</sup>

What should emerge from the above analysis is that Islam did not play a significant role in the emergence of the Aligarh Muslims, nor in their achieving the coveted position they achieved, that of assuming the leadership of the Muslim 'nation'. Despite the presence of Islamic groups, with regard to the eventual outcome in terms of representing the Muslim 'nation', Islam does not seem to be a factor of critical significance in the politics of Muslims in the late nineteenth century, and despite the anti-cow slaughter campaigns and the Urdu-Hindi controversy, nor do we see any sign of a marked form of communalism. Those who had had access to the social and power circles of the rulers and had managed to consolidate their positions on account of that access, became the broader representatives for the larger group. Perhaps there was nothing new in this process, where the *ashraf* and well-born, under Muslim rulers, had done precisely the same. Aligarh, for one, lacked any intellectual tradition or pretensions, so there was no interests amongst the educated classes in anything other than jobs. The story seems to be one repeated from the past, no different from earlier experience, where the

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<sup>160</sup> Ralph Russell, *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History* (London: Zed Books, 1992), p. 80.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

elite, in a pre-modern world, unchallenged by other social groups, were in a position to claim, or be granted, representativeness. While there may have been other aspirants trying to become representatives of the Muslim *qaum*, their lack of adequate and appropriate social skills, kept them away from the centres of power and privilege. Clearly, a new class was created by Syed Ahmad Khan's interventions, and nurtured by the British. Without either of the two, it is improbable, for better or worse, that there would have been the emergence of a concerted and focussed western-oriented, English-educated, Muslim class, and different forms of modernity, those more indigenous, perhaps, may have emerged leading to a very different narrative and trajectory than the one experienced in the Indian subcontinent between 1857-1947.