EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG THE MUSLIMS OF BRITISH INDIA

EDUCAÇÃO E CONSCIÊNCIA DE COMUNIDADE POR ENTRE OS MUÇULMANOS DA ÍNDIA BRITÂNICA

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Abstract: The object of analysis in this article is the Aligarh Movement, which was the base of the movement's founder and guiding spirit, the influential modernist Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), whose project to modernise Muslims was named after a town in the United Provinces that was home to its most important institutions, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (later, in 1920, Aligarh Muslim University) and the Muhammadan Educational Conference.

Keywords: Aligarh; Sayyid Ahmad Khan; Muslim League; 19th Century; 20th Century.

Resumo: O objeto de análise neste artigo é o *Aligarh Movement*, que foi a base do fundador do movimento e espírito orientador, o influente moderninsta Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), cujo projeto de modernizar os Muçulmanos foi batizado em honra de uma cidade nas Províncias Unidas e que foi o lar para as suas mais importantes instituições, o Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (posteriormente, em 1920, a Aligarh Muslim University) e a Muhammadan Educational Conference.

Palavras-chave: Aligarh; Sayyid Ahmad Khan; Liga Muçulmana; Século XIX; Século XX.

Introduction

On the 14th August 1947, Pakistan became a reality. Originally conceived as a State for the Indian Muslims, the origin of the idea of Pakistan has often provided lively subjects for controversy among scholars and publicists. Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), in his interview with Beverley Nichols (1898-1983), pointed out that the idea of dividing India was not new for it had occurred to John Bright (1811-1889) in 1877 (NICHOLS, 1944, p.192). Talking about the distant future when the British Government might have to withdraw from India, Bright urged that the peoples of different Provinces in India should be encouraged to regard themselves as citizens of different states so that at the time of transfer of power there might be five or six great

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successor States (apud COUPLAND, 1944, p. 50-51). Similarly, Communist writers have credited Stalin with foreseeing as early as 1912 the breakup of India into diverse nationalities: "In the case of India, too, it will probably be found that innumerable nationalities, till then lying dormant, would come into life with the further course of bourgeois development" (apud DUTT, 1955, p. 239).

The idea of Muslims forming a separate state in India was mooted as early as December 1883. It was Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) who suggested in Calcutta that in his view practically all the Provinces of Northern India should be placed under Muslim Government and those of Southern India under Hindu Government. In this scheme, the British would continue as the controlling power drawing their support from British troops stationed in each of the Provinces, but "the whole civil administration, legislation, and finance should be left to native hands" (BLUNT, 1909, p. 107-108).

After the inauguration of the Government of India Act, 1919, it became clear that the British seriously contemplated the transfer of political power by stages to Indian hands. This created a feeling of uneasiness among Muslims as regards their share of power. It was significant that even at that stage Muslims regarded themselves and their problems as somewhat separate from the rest of India. Thus, Mawlana Mohammad Ali Jouhar (1878-1931), speaking on the resolution that reforms should be introduced in the North-West Frontier province of India in the annual session of the All-India Muslim League held in Bombay in December 1924, said:

> If a line be drawn from Constantinople to Delhi on the map of the world it would be found that at least right up to Saharanpur, there was a corridor of purely Muslim people or Muslims were in clear majority. This gave them the clue for understanding the backward condition in which the Frontier and the Punjab were purposely kept by those in power. (SAYEED, 2004, p. 103)

One gets another glimpse of Muslim apprehensions and their separatist tendencies in the Nehru Report of 1928. The Report recorded:

> The Muslims being in a minority in India as a whole fear that the majority may harass them, and to meet this difficulty they have made a novel suggestion – that they should at least dominate in some parts of India. (SAYEED, 2004, p. 103)

All this, at best, was a hazy and uncertain groping towards a separate state. A clear conception was given by Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) on the occasion of the 25th session of the All-India Muslim League, held in Allahabad and where he was

elected as president. In an historical speech, on the 29th December 1930, Iqbal devised for the first time the creation of a separate state for the Indian Muslims (IQBAL, 1930, p. 3-26), and his conception was not only clear but comprehensive in the sense that it was based on both geographical and ideological factors. Echoing Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (FICHTE, 1922), Muhammad Iqbal talked about the question of Islam and Nationalism, saying that for the Muslims of India the main formative force through History had been Islam, which had given them the emotions and basic loyalties which gradually united scattered individuals and groups, transforming them into a well defined people. Addressing the question of the unity of the Indian nation, Iqbal raised the issues of the problem Indian Muslims would face as a minority, in their purposes of applying Islam as a moral, political and ethical ideal, if religion was to be considered a private matter, facing the risk of suffering the same fate as Christianity in Europe. For him, the unity of the Indian nation had to be searched not in the negation of some but in the reciprocal harmony and in the cooperation of many. Although the attempts to find that principle of internal harmony had failed so far, still each group had its own right to a free development according to its lines. Following this line of thought, Iqbal considered that India was composed by non-territorial unities, contrary to European countries, with human groups belonging to different races, speaking different languages and professing different religions. Their behaviour was not determined by a common racial conscience, and even the Hindus were not a homogenous group. The principle of European democracy could not be applied to India without acknowledging the fact of the existence of communitarian groups. The Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India inside India was, for Iqbal and for that reason, totally justified. That State would include the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan, with self-government within, or without, the British Empire, and the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appeared to him to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least those of North-West India. That state would be the best defender against a foreign invasion of India, and Iqbal assured the Hindus that they had nothing to be afraid of the fact that the creation of Muslim autonomous states would meant the introduction of a religious government, since he, Iqbal, had already indicated the meaning of the word 'religion' as applied to Islam. The Muslims of India, who were seventy million, were far more homogeneous, in Iqbal's opinion, than any other people in India. Indeed, they were the only Indian people who could fit the description of a nation, in the modern sense of the word.

These issues were again focused in the Presidential Address delivered at the annual session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Lahore, on the 21st March 1932 (IQBAL, 1932), and more developed in his book, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (IQBAL, 1934). However, what was most noteworthy in Iqbal's conception was the ideological basis of his state. His idea was not inspired by fear or hostility towards the Hindus:

> A community which is inspired by feelings of ill-will towards other communities is low and ignoble. I entertain the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious and social institutions of other communities... Yet I love the communal group which is the source of my life and my behaviour; and which has formed me what I am by giving me its religion, its literature, its thought, its culture, and thereby re-creating its whole past, as a living operative factor, in my present consciousness (IQBAL, 1930; for further details: SAYEED, 2004, p. 102-106).

According to Faisal Devji, the Muslim 'community' emerged in India during the nineteenth century as a direct consequence of colonial rule. With the destruction of royal and aristocratic forms of power in British territory, these indigenous sources of profane authority were displaced by religious ones, which for the first time stood free of the formers tutelage. In other words, it was the Muslim community's separation from political authority that made it a religious entity in the modern sense. Yet by freeing Islam of such profane elements, the secular politics of colonialism freed it from all inherited forms of authority, making the Muslim community into a site of competition between different groups of divines and laymen. The birth of this new collectivity was signalled by its adoption of a name unknown to history, with Muslims in the nineteenth century calling themselves a *qawm*, an Arabic word meaning something like 'tribe' or 'people' that had rarely been used to describe religious groups in the past. Eventually, this word would become an equivalent for the equally novel term 'nation' in South Asia. Notwithstanding their reference to ties of kith and kin in other contexts, neither community nor *qawm* were names used to describe local forms of Muslim belonging, being deployed instead to represent the disparate, dispersed and merely demographic collection of Queen Victoria's Muslim subjects (DEVJI, 2011, p. 111-113).

While its demographic boundaries may have been mapped by the colonial census and its juridical borders by Anglo-Muhammadan law, the Muslim community was occupied by Indians themselves in different ways. Indeed, it soon became the site of great struggles between Muslim groups in northern India, primarily Sunni clerics and

their relatives among the laity. Both these groups belonged to the same class of minor landholders, administrators and bureaucrats, all-Urdu-speaking, who had been liberated by colonial rule from the kings and nobles they had once served. Fully conscious of their independence, these men called themselves '*sharif*' ('wellborn'), and set out to recast Islam in their own image, thus lending the *qawm* some substance as an ethnic category. It were the laymen who set the terms of debate in this struggle and especially those who gathered under the 'reformist' and pro-British sign of the Aligarh Movement whose project to modernise Muslims was named after a town in the United Provinces that was home to its great institutions, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (later, in 1920, Aligarh Muslim University) and the Muhammadan Educational Conference. Aligarh was also the base of the movement's founder and guiding spirit, the influential modernist Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) (DEVJI, 2011, p. 111-132), which are going to be the object of analysis in this article.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement

The second half of the 19th century was a period of great richness in the history of the modern Islamic movement, when a group of Muslim intellectuals, in different parts of the world, rigorously examined the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence. The central theological problems at the core of these examinations focused on the validity of the knowledge derived from sources external to the *Qur'an* and the methodology of traditional sources of jurisprudence: the *Qur'an*, the *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), *ijma* (consensus of the Muslim community), and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). The epistemological step adopted was to reinterpret the first two, the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*, and to transform the last two, *ijma* and *qiyas*, in the light of scientific rationalism. Among those who had a strong impact were al-Afghani (1838-1897), Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) and Amir 'Ali (1849-1928), who presented Islam in a way that was consistent with modern ideas and rational sciences. They were fascinated with what the West had achieved in technological and scientific progress: the Newtonian conception of the Universe, Spencer's sociology, Darwinian ideas and even Western style of life. All of them argued that, since Islam was a world religion, it was capable of adapting to the changing environment of each age, particularly since the use of law and reason was characteristic of the perfect Muslim community (ANSARI, 1986, p. 510; DALLAL, 1993, p. 341-359; MOADDEL, 2001, p. 669; MOADDEL, 2005, p. 42-45).

Although the felt need for reformist thinking was endogenous, with movements which proposed a fresh rereading against the inherited traditions (PETERS, 1980, p. 131-145), the shock of European expansionism beginning in the later part of the 18th century, early 19th, the expansive social and intellectual power of Europe, seen not only as an adversary but also as a challenge, in some cases an attractive one, brought a new element which reinforced that feeling. The power and greatness of Europe, science and modern technologies, political institutions of European states, and social morality of modern societies were all favourite issues, forcing the formulation of a fundamental problem: how could Muslims acquire the strength to confront Europe and become part of the modern world?

As the century went on, and with the rise of the new educated class in the 1860s and 1870s, a split appeared among those who supported the reforms, a division of opinion which was about the bases of authority: whether it should lie with officials responsible to their own sense of justice and the interests of the political order, or with a representative government produced by elections. The split between generations of Muslim thinkers went deeper than this, however. The second generation was aware of a problem implicit in the changes which were taking place. Reform of institutions would be dangerous unless rooted in some kind of moral solidarity: what should this be, and how far could it be derived from the teachings of Islam? Such a question became more pressing as the new schools began to produce a generation not grounded in the traditional Islamic learning, and exposed to the winds of education and learning blowing from the West.

Ideological debates and religious disputes in 19th century resulted in the rise of several important issues in the wider Islamic world such as: 1) The empirical versus the Islamic sciences; 2) The rational basis of law versus the *Shari'a*; 3) Western civilization versus the abode of Islam; 4) Gender equality versus male supremacy; and 5) Constitutionalism versus the Islamic conception of sovereignty. In their re-examination of Islamic worldviews, Islamic modernists pointed to the methodological and conceptual inadequacy of Islamic orthodoxy. In India and Egypt, the active presence of the followers of the Enlightenment, the Westernizers, and the Evangelicals, resulted in the rise of a pluralistic discursive field, where modernist Muslim scholars faced a multiplicity of issues (MOADDEL, 2001).

In 1832 the Reverend Midgeley John Jennings (d. 1857) arrived at India, and became, in 1852, chaplain of the Christian population of Delhi, and hoped to convert the local population to Anglican Christianity, thus ending with the local 'false religions', a

sentiment shared by many Evangelical British in India, who were expecting not only to rule and manage the country but also to 'save' her, using their influence through the British East India Company to convert the country. The British Empire was the proof that God was on their side: to propagate the faith would augment even more that empire. Some Evangelical figures, such as the Reverends Henry Martyn (1781-1812), Joseph Wolff (1795-1862) and, especially, Carl Pfander (1805-1865), were important missionaries with an aggressive posture of 'frontal attack' against Islam, exemplified by the publication of books such as *Mizan al-Haqq* (*Balance of Truth*), first published in 1829 (PFANDER, 1910), or *Remarks on the Nature of Muhammadanism* (PFANDER, 1840; DALRYMPLE, 2007, p. 58-63, 126-127; MOADDEL, 2005, p. 52-62; POWELL, 1993; TROLL, 1994, p. 85-88).

The impacts on the Indian Muslim community were felt and, at an intellectual level, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan became preoccupied mostly with theological issues. Born on 17th October 1817 into an important family from Delhi, which belonged to the Mughal aristocracy, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's ancestors claimed to be direct descendents from the Prophet Muhammad (hence his title Sayyid) through his daughter Fatima and his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali and Ahmad Khan's family had migrated to India through Iran and Afghanistan (the biographical information on Sayyid Ahmad Khan is based on Malik (1968, p. 221-44; 1970, p. 129-147), Murad (1996, p. 1-4), Rahman (1958, p. 82-8). After his father's death in 1838, he started to work as a civil servant in a Civil Court under the British East India Company in Delhi, dedicating himself to the writing of various subjects like History, Sciences, Theology and Civil Law. At the same time, he re-read the Muslim medieval classical works and produced his first historiographical work, which dwells on the ancient buildings and monuments of Delhi and surroundings (KHAN, 1854).

The events of 1857 caught him in Bijnaur as a civil judge, and his journal between May 1857 and April 1858 became a monograph with the title *Tarikh-i Sarkashi-i Bijnaur*, which is a history of the Mutiny in Bijnaur. In 1859, Ahmad Khan published a book in Urdu, *Risalah-i-Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind* (*Causes of the Indian Mutiny*), later translated into English, in which he criticised the mutiny of the previous years, arguing that there had been only one cause for it, all the others being a consequence: the fact that the natives of India blamed the government for the diminishing of their position and dignity and for maintaining them in a lower position. In addition, the natives blamed the British for daily suffering and for being afraid of abuse at the hands of the officials, and Ahmad Khan also exposed the errors of the

administration of the East India Company as well as what the native population thought were the actual objectives of the Company: proselytism of Christian missionaries and subsequent conversion of India; in the economic field, the fiscal and financial monopolies of the Company, the smashing of local industries with the objective of creating a market for British exports; the huge fiscal burden in northern India, causing misery; destruction of political and military organization; and the deep discrimination and despise that the Company had for the native population.

What happened to the Muslims after the Mutiny shocked Sayyid Ahmad Khan greatly and he pursued the task of rapprochement between the British, on one hand, and the Indians and Muslims on the other. In 1860-61, Ahmad Khan published his *Risâlah Khair Khawahân Musalmanân: An Account of the Loyal Mohamadans of India*, in which he defended that the Indian Muslims were the most loyal subjects of the British Raj (Rule) because of their disposition and because of the principles of their religion, being convinced that the British had come to stay and that their supremacy, with that of the West, could not be doubted in the near future. So, Muslims should rethink their way of living, being at the risk of falling further. For him, the existing resentment was due to mutual prejudices and ignorance. His effort to mediate between Christianity and Islam took shape in his work *Ahkam-i Ta'am-i Ahl-i Kitab*, dealing with the social contact between Muslims, Christians and Jews, and in a commentary to the *Bible*, where he tried to establish that both religions derived from the same source and that their similitude would be quickly recognised by whoever studied and compared them.

In that commentary, *Tabîyyan alkalâm fî'l-tafsîr al-tawrâ wa'l-injîl calâ millat al-islam* (*The Mahomedan Commentary on the Bible*), he included, as an appendix, a *fatwa* issued by Jamal ibn al-'Abd Allah 'Umar al-Hanfi, the Mufti of Mecca, who said that as long as some of the rites of Islam were maintained in India, this was *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam). The aim was to contain the *fatwa* issued by some Indian *'ulama* saying that India had become *Dar al-Harb* (Abode of War). At the same time, Ahmad Khan tried to make Muslims see that modern western education, with its emphasis on science and rational thought, would only be beneficial to the community, and also tried to synthesize it with Islamic religious thought, defending that in this there was nothing that opposed to the study of science and that there was nothing to be afraid of from its impact.

Arguing that the *Qur'an* should be interpreted according to each time and its conditions, Sayyid Ahmad Khan defended that the *Hadith* did not furnish an adequate basis for the understanding of Islam, and that religion had suffered many changes

through time, especially with the additions and mixings of the specialists' opinions. So, it was necessary to extract all the 'exotic' ideas and put them in their respective perspectives. Ahmad Khan conceived a new educational system, in which the responsibility to educate future generations would be on the Muslim community itself and in which the intellectuals would receive education in Islam and in Western sciences, becoming Aligarh's main educational basis, with future impacts in Indian Muslim society in the modernist trend.

Ahmad Khan created two schools in the cities of Muradabad and Ghazipur, having established in the first one, in 1864, the Scientific Society, which was moved in 1867 to Aligarh. The objectives of the Society were to translate works on Arts and Sciences from English or other European languages so they could be understood by the natives; to find and publish rare and valuable oriental works which did not have a religious character; to publish a periodical, the weekly *Aligarh Institute Gazette*; to offer lectures on scientific subjects or others that were considered useful. The main objective for Aligarh was to become the source of a new leadership for Indian Muslims, responding to the new conditions in the world and based on new kinds of knowledge, claiming this new knowledge for Islam, and protecting the faith and identity of their English-educated sons in the face of competing sorts of belief and allegiance (LELYVELD, 1982, p. 101).

In 1866 the Aligarh British Indian Association was created, with more political aims in the sense of influencing the government's decisions in what was related to Indian Muslims, but with little impact. Ahmad Khan, who had been elected honorary Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of London in 1864, visited England in 1869-70, staying in the British capital for seventeen months with his two sons, Sayyid Hamid and Sayyid Mahmud, a friend, Mirza Khuda Dad Beg, and an employee. Besides giving him the opportunity for contact with the local reality, the stay also gave him the chance of meeting the State Secretary for India and Queen Victoria herself, who gave him the title of Companion of the Star of India. His visit convinced him of the British superiority and allowed him to read William Muir's biography of the Prophet Muhammad, which disturbed him deeply, for religious reasons and personal ones, because the Prophet was his ancestor.

Based on information drawn from the study of some Muslim sources, *The Life of Mahomet*, written by Sir William Muir (MUIR, 1861) in response to a veteran missionary's request, amplified the thesis that Islam was a backward religion, and was acclaimed as a great help in the missionary enterprise. In that work, Sir William Muir

talked about divorce, polygamy and slavery, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote a refutation with the title *Essays on the Life of Mohammed and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (KHAN BAHADOR, 1870), containing twelve essays, an endeavour which forced him to search for materials in the British Museum and in the India Office Library (RAHMAN, 2004, p. 1-6). Ahmad Khan was also able to visit Oxford and Cambridge Universities and some colleges, like Eton and Harrow, which would serve him as models for his Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (LELYVELD, 1982, p. 87).

While in London and hearing that his kinsman Sami Ullah was involved in an effort to establish a new Arabic academy in their hometown of Delhi, Ahmad Khan wrote that 'the old, run-in-the mill madrasahs won't do us any good'. In a letter to Mahdi Ali (later Nawab Muhsin ul-Mulk, 1837-1907), he wrote that 'If you came here [Great-Britain], you would see how education is carried on and how children are taught, how knowledge is acquired and a community attains honour' (LELYVELD, 1982, p. 86-87).

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was only beginning to address himself to the formulation of an educational program especially for Muslims; until then his concern had been to promote modern European science, technology and scholarship through the medium of Urdu, which he conceived to be the cosmopolitan language of northern India. Although he had been very much occupied with questions of the theology, practice, historical reputation and present fortune of Islam, it was only toward the end of his London trip that these two streams came together: Sayyid Ahmad Khan announced to his friend that he would now devote himself to establishing a new kind of *madrassah* for the benefit of the Muslims of India, also believing that the cause of Islam was bound up with the worldly 'success' of Muslims, with the social standing of the Muslim community in a world in which not everyone was a Muslim or the client of a Muslim, particularly the enlightened and (hence) powerful were not. In this sense the validity of Islam was bound up in the living course of the world's activities. But now worldly success was ideologically prior: not by being a good Muslim would leadership descend upon the *ummah* - now referred to as *qawm*, more ethnic group than common confession but rather success in areas conceived as outside the realms of religious concern would benefit the religious cause.

Back to India in October 1870 and with a new orientation for his ideas and efforts, Ahmad Khan dedicated himself to the social and intellectual regeneration of Indian Muslims. Though Aligarh fostered loyalty to British rule, it did so with a clear purpose and pattern in mind. Aligarh was to be the spawning ground of a new, self-

conscious Muslim elite, prepared by their English education to take their proper leadership roles in the political and administrative life of British India. For this to happen, the education offered there had to be cast in a quality model: Aligarh was to be a Muslim Cambridge, the same Cambridge which would supply key members of the faculty and some important features, chief of which were union debates and a cricket club. But Muslim features were also emphasized. The Muslims who founded and managed the college frequently clashed with the British staff, and among themselves, over just who was in charge and what would be the focus of the curriculum. Islamic theology and oriental learning gave way to the English curriculum, but the consciousness of being an 'Indian Muslim' was fostered, and perhaps even created, at Aligarh, a sense of solidarity created first among a brotherhood of students, which was later projected onto the Muslim community in British India as a whole.

Many translations of English works in the fields of History, Political Economy, Agriculture, Mathematics and others were published, and the institution of modern education and Western scientific knowledge as a way of reform and renewal of the Muslim community and/or Muslim countries was also common in other places like Egypt, the Ottoman Empire or Tunisia (SIINO, 2003, p. 9-28).

In 1871 William Hunter published his *The Indian Musalmans* (HUNTER, 1871), with the aim of creating a better understanding between rulers and ruled, as a way to safeguard British power in India. Using as a basis the various trials after the Mutiny, he came to the conclusion that there was a causal relation between the Wahhabi activities and the permanent instability in the North-Western Frontier. For him, the movement was well organized and its leaders claimed all the functions of sovereignty over their constituents. The bonds that connected the members of that 'secret order' were extraordinarily strong and permanent. The headquarters, in Patna, and the controlling machinery throughout rural areas for the

> […] spreading of insatisfaction, sent a multitude of zealots carefully indoctrinated with treason and equipped with vast literature about the duty to wage war against the British. An uninterrupted flow of money and fiery recruits determined to extirpate the infidel crossed the border. (HUNTER, 1871, pp. 20-21)

This picture described by Hunter caused a protest from the part of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who characterized the book as misleading and historically inaccurate. In a recension to that book, *The Indian Musalmans* (KHAN in MOHAMMAD, 1972, p. 65-

82), he pointed out many incorrections in the affirmations of Hunter about the Wahhabi precepts, and made a critical history of that movement from 1823 until the publication of that book. For Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the permanent transborder hostility against British rule had nothing to do with Wahhabi fomentations but with the continuing presence in the border of a large, non-loyal and terrified population, Hindu and Muslim alike, who had run away from British territory, after the Mutiny, to escape the wrath of the conqueror. The population sought shelter in the tribes and started a new life in an unknown environment, and there was nothing strange in the fact that those migrants received visitors and money from their families and others in India. Finally, the tribal enmity against authority in the country near the Indus River was something recurrent in Indian history, as illustrated by the expeditions sent in the past by the emperors Akbar (1542-1605), Shah Jahan (1592-1666), and Aurangzeb (1618-1707), all Muslim, and which had failed in their goal of subjugating the insurgents.

For Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Islam's demonization and the distortion of its history in the West were directly responsible for the political adversity to Indian Muslims. For him, a more objective approach to the past would make the West end its strong aversion to Islam and its followers, and would also ensure that even the Muslims rediscovered their own identity and their own ideals. History would be an instrument in the Muslim renaissance and this attitude influenced many like Shibli Nu'mani (1857-1914), Zaka' Allah (1832-1911) and Muhsin ul-Mulk, among others.

Ahmad Khan was in the judicial service until his retirement, in 1876, moment from which he established himself at Aligarh and where the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College had been created the year before. In 1886 he established 'The Muhammadan Educational Conference', which was held annually in many Indian cities, and the magazine *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq* (*Refinement of Morals: Mohammedan Social Reformer*) which had been started in 1870 and modelled after the style of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, was published with the aim of educating and civilising Indian Muslims, with Ahmad Khan being its principal contributor until the end of the periodical in 1893. The essays written by him examined the foundations of Muslim society as well as its institutions, in the light of Reason and religious sanction. The *Tahdhîb* attracted an audience which shared with Sayyid Ahmad the objectives of reform. While on one hand he tried to contain the forces of scepticism and irreligion liberated by Western influences, on the other, he strongly fought the opposition to Western education.

The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, precursor of the Aligarh Muslim University, was founded in 1875 by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan to educate

Muslim youth in the western sciences through the medium of English, but in an Islamic environment. Although the College admitted non-Muslims from the beginning, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in his later years warned Muslims to stay aloof from the Indian National Congress which he feared would jeopardise their new-found favour with the British rulers, or which, if successful in achieving independence, would leave them at the mercy of the Hindu majority. Indeed in 1906, eight years after his death, some of Aligarh's patrons were active in the creation of the Muslim League. Although it is true that some five hundred of the students of the faculty, aroused by the Khilafat issue during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1919-1924), seceded from the College in 1920 to establish the *Jamia Millia Islamia* (Islamic National University), during the last decade of British rule Aligarh became a citadel and recruiting ground for Jinnah's Muslim League activities and for the demand of Pakistan (WRIGHT JR., 1966, p. 50-63).

In 1882 the Government of India appointed an Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir William Wilson Hunter to ascertain views of responsible Indians. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was also one of the witnesses who appeared before the Education Commission. The proceedings of the Education Commission commenced in the Hall of the Aligarh Institute and Sir Sayyid, appearing as a witness, stressed the need for more engagement from the part of the British Government towards the Muslim community relating to matters of education. He also acknowledged the shortcomings of the Muslim community and the causes which prevented it from taking advantage of the system established by the British Government, causes which were, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, political traditions, social customs, religious beliefs, and poverty: To embrace modern education, which was built on European languages, in this case English, was the same as embracing Christianity, with all its consequences (KHAN, 1882, p. 83-98).

Although he had no expertise in Western sciences or Islamic ones, especially in the study of the *Qur'an* or the *Hadith* (something which earned him some criticism from some *'ulama*), Ahmad Khan tried to demythologize the *Qur'an* and its teachings. His interpretation of some fundamental aspects of Islamic teachings which could not be demonstrated by modern scientific methods found a strong resistance in some more traditionalist sectors but, in spite of that, he earned a widening popularity in the elite and, in the early 1880s, he became a very important figure in the Muslim community. Ahmad Khan wanted to reinterpret Islam, defending a modern *'ilm al-Kalam* with the aim of showing that 'the Work of God (Nature and its laws) was according to the Word

of God (the *Qur'an*)', something that earned him the epithet of *Naturi*. For that reinterpretation, Ahmad Khan elaborated a *tafsir* (the interpretation of the *Qur'an*), which was published at the same time as it was being written. The work started in 1879 and it was completed with the author's death in 1898. This *tafsir* found strong resistance not only from the *'ulama* but also from some of his friends and admirers, like Nawab Muhsin ul-Mulk, who were uncomfortable with the radical interpretations of some of the *Qur'an*'s verses. In response, Ahmad Khan wrote a little treatise with the aim of explaining the principles of his *tafsir* which was published in 1892 with the title *Tahrîr fi'l-asûl al-tafsîr*, where he declared that Nature was the 'Work of God' and that the *Qur'an* was the 'Word of God' and no contradiction could exist between them (VOLL, 1994, p. 112).

Until the end of his life, Sayyid Ahmad Khan dedicated himself more and more to the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which produced a unique community of pupils and which, with time, would become the political and educational capital of Muslim India (for comprehensive details on the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, see Bhatnagar (1969), Jain (1965) and Lelyveld (1978)).

The sister organization, All-India Mohammadan Educational Conference, founded by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1886, a year after the establishment of the All-India National Congress, became a forum for the discussion of social and educational issues and an important factor in the promotion of Muslim solidarity throughout the sub-continent. Sayyid Ahmad Khan tried to stay away from 'political' issues, giving more attention to Education, and his work was mainly educational and reformative. He never considered himself a politician and always tried to forge a political accommodation with the British. At the same time, and due to the fact that Muslims had become a 'minority' in the context of the larger India, some Indian Muslims forged an emotional link with the Ottoman Empire, which also followed the Hanafi School of jurisprudence, and was considered the last symbol of Muslim pride.

In a communication addressed to one of his English friends, Sayyid Ahmad Khan said that the religion of Islam, in which he had full and abiding faith, preached radical principles and was opposed to all forms of monarchy, whether hereditary or limited. It approved of the rule of a popularly elected president; it denounced the concentration of capital and insisted upon the division of properties and possessions among legal heirs on the demise of their owners. But the religion which taught him those principles also inculcated certain others: if God willed the subjection of Muslims to another race, which granted them religious freedom, governed them justly, preserved

peace, protected their life and belongings, as the British did in India, the Muslims should wish them well and owe allegiance (GRAHAM, 1885, p. 188).

Conclusion

Although Islamic modernists like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Sayyid Ahmad Khan shared a modern reformist agenda, they had divergent political orientations and objectives. While Ahmad Khan held a position of political loyalty to the British (KHAN, 1887; KHAN, 1888), al-Afghani was deeply anti-colonial, anti-British and pan-Islamist, violently criticising Ahmad Khan, considering him subservient to the British (AHMAD, 1960, p. 55-78; AHMAD, 1969, p. 476-504). Ahmad Khan was knighted as Knight Commander of the Star of India in 1888 and died in Aligarh in 1898. His work and thought influenced many who would play an important role in the intellectual and political affairs of Muslim India. The implications of the positions taken by Sayyid Ahmad Khan led to a variety of developments, either in opposition or developing his positions further.

His positions were not accepted by all of the major Muslim teachers, and the richness of Indian Muslim thought at the end of the nineteenth century are clearly visible in the variety of the more conservative positions that had emerged by the end of the century. New educational institutions were a leading part of the more traditional revival. In 1867, an Islamic school was established at Deoband by scholars in the tradition of Wali Allah (1702/3-1762) and their goal was to revive a rigorous study of the traditional Islamic disciplines and to provide a link between the Muslim community and its traditional identity. The Deoband School was relatively conservative in accepting the validity of the law schools and rejected compromises with Hindu customs and the adaptationism of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, establishing an international reputation with ties to the *'ulama* of al-Azhar in Egypt (VOLL, 1994, p. 113).

The more conservative style was also manifested in other important schools. The oldest and most conservative of the major schools was the Farangi Mahal in Lucknow, which maintained a traditional curriculum and was relatively aloof from the arguments of the modernists and active traditionalists. A less conservative school was the *Nadwat al-Ulama*, established in Lucknow in 1894. Its leaders attempted to find a middle path between the modernism of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the conservativism of Deoband and hoped to provide the training necessary for the *'ulama* to be able to reassert their role as the moral leaders of the Muslim community in India.

In the late 19th century a group known as the *Ahl al-Hadith* also emerged, which built on the tradition of *hadith* study that had been firmly established in India by Shah Wali Allah, emphasising the reliance on the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*. Its members were unwilling to accept the teachings of the medieval scholars as binding unless they were directly based on the fundamental sources of the faith. The vigorous activity within the Indian Muslim community during the 19th century shows the dynamism of Islam in the early modern era. Movements were built on the Islamic foundations of the past but also reacted to the changing modern conditions, and the community was not isolated within the Islamic world. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was aware of the works of Khayr al-Din Pasha (d. 1890) in Tunisia, and Chiragh 'Ali (1844-1895), a close associate of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, read the works of al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) in Egypt as well as the writings of Khayr al-Din. The *Ahl al-Hadith* was influenced by nineteenth-century Yemeni scholarship, and virtually all educated Muslims were aware of developments in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. The second half of the nineteenth century was a time of real Islamic resurgence in India, in intellectual and religious terms, despite the fact that it took place in the context of foreign politico-military control (VOLL, 1994, 114-5).

As Ruth Soule Arnon wrote, some universities are simply places of instruction, and others are pre-eminently symbols of religious or ethnic aspirations. The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College - or the Aligarh Muslim University, as it later became in 1920 – although numerically less important than other Universities (out of 1,184 Muslims graduating in India between 1882 and 1892, only 220 came from Aligarh, as against 410 from other colleges affiliated with the University of Allahabad), became the symbol of Muslim aspirations on the Indian sub-continent, an emblem of Muslim self-rule and separatism – 'a Pakistan of the educational realm long before the real Pakistan was imagined' (ARNON, 1982, p. 461-468).

However, it should be stressed that that aspiration was not universal. The Muslim community as such did not exist and many were the leaders and intellectuals who fought against the idea of a separate state for the Muslims of India. For example, in 1937, the *Jamia'at-i 'Ulama-i Hind*, an organization founded in 1919 and led by Mawlana Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957), the renowned Indian Islamic leader, also head of the *Dar ul-Ulum Deoband*, was split with a faction which was supportive of the Muslim League's demands, originating the *Jamia'at-i 'Ulama-i Islam*, led by Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (1886-1949). In 1938, Madani wrote *Islam awr mutahhadih qaumiyat* [*Islam and Composite Nationalism*] (MADANI, 2005). In this book, Madani, who had spent some time in British jails between 1914 and 1917, depicted a multicommunal

Indian state that would be compatible with the teachings of Islam, and laid out in systematic form the positions that the author had taken in speeches and letters from the early 1920s on the question of nationalism as well as other related issues of national importance. Using various verses from the *Qur'an*, Madani, with his book, aimed at opposing the divisive policy of Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League, dealing mainly with two aspects: the meaning of the term *Qawm* and how it was distinct from the term *millat*, and the crucial distinction between those two words and their true meanings in the *Qur'an* and the *Hadiths*. By proposing 'composite nationalism', this book strongly argued that despite cultural, linguistic and religious differences, the people of India were but one nation, and, according to the author, any effort to divide Indians on the basis of religion, caste, culture, ethnicity and language was a manouver of the ruling power.

Founded in 1875 in Aligarh, a town that was then eighty miles from Delhi, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College was a source of pride and leadership for those Indian Muslims who were deeply influenced by European political thought and British education. What gave Aligarh a national reputation was its indissoluble connection with its founder, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who made the college his base of operations, used its newspaper as one of his mouthpieces and made it clear that among the many organizations he had started, none was more dear to his heart than the Muhammadan Anglo- Oriental College.

However, and as David Lelyveld found out (LELYVELD, 1975, p. 227-40), Aligarh also had its cleavages, which were not based on identities established at birth nor on divisions of religious sect, region or lineage; nor did they represent in-group structural tensions characteristic of certain primordial social units like village and family. Instead, the in-group tensions among the *alumni* were based on their positioning within a deliberately constructed social organization of which they were voluntary participants. On one level each faction was quite heterogeneous. Some included both Sunnis and Shias, Sayyid, Shaikh, Pathan and even a converted Kashmiri Pandit. But on a higher level of generalization all these people were remarkably homogeneous as to religion, region, social and economic background and, of course, education. They were all Muslims from the Persianized government service class of northern India. They owned little or no land and had to earn their living, as their fathers had, in law, government or teaching.

It was also at Aligarh that they became indoctrinated with the ideology of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: that Indian Muslims, the former rulers of the country, had declined and

that the only hope for their regeneration was to mobilize them under the aegis of Aligarh. This was an ideology that resonated powerfully with their own family histories: their families too had in some way or other been dispossessed, and yet their fathers had been able to find individual success under the new power. Sayyid Ahmad Khan now inspired them to project this perception of family experience on to a vast historical aggregate: the Indian Muslim community.

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