

CHAPTER - VI

SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN'S LEADERSHIP, THE ALIGARH MOVEMENT

AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

With the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) Hindus had received modern education and made their ground sound and a middle class emerged out of them by the end of the third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century¹. But on the other hand, Muslims did not adopt modern scientific education and thus no middle class came into existence. They were highly slow to adjust themselves to the growing nationalism which the Hindus already had developed.² Moreover, Muslims were still being suspected of conspiring against the British Government. The appearance of Sir Syed after revolt of 1857 had softened British attitude by writing "The causes of Indian Revolt 1857". But still much more was needed to be done.

A number of newspapers had been increasing after the Revolt, 1857 and those papers were producing a good deal of anti-Government feelings. The period of Lord Lytton, the then Viceroy of India, was highly discontent and this was because of his economic and political policies and exploitation of the people was also accelerating.³

The economic conditions of the Indian people had been fact deteriorating and the country was boiling with discontent. At that time, two English men, Allan Octavian Hume and William Wedderburn, both officials, were closely

associated with Indian's Political awakening and aspirations. The growth of popular discontent, the spreading of underground organisations and the growing unrest in the country had been demonstrated in the Deccan by the risings of the peasants whose patience were exhausted and who were ready to commit violence on a large scale. On the basis of these information and facts, Mr. A.O.Hume apprehended that the revolt of 1857 might be repeated.⁴ Wedderburn, in his biography of A.O. Hume, says ; About the years 1878 and 1879, economic in combination with political troubles were actively at work throughout India; the physical suffering of the many acted on by the intellectual discontent of the few, was rapidly bringing popular unrest to the danger point. For masses of the peasantry, scourged by poverty, family and pestilence, were beginning to give way to despair; they could not make their voices heard, and they saw no hope of relief. This critical condition of affairs was clearly understood by Mr. Hume.⁵

A.O. Hume further apprehended and realised that the Government of the day, administered by foreign officials in a mechanical manner, was out of touch with the people. No channel was existed for communication between rulers and the ruled and the British officials were almost fully ignorant of the attitudes of the people of India. "There was therefore a great gulf fixed between the foreign bureaucracy, self-centred on the heights of Simla and the millions painfully foiling in the plains below."⁶

Mr. Hume also realised that the poor had been in a state of desparation an hopelessness. They were convinced

that they would starve and die. Thus they began to think of doing something and that something was nothing but violence..⁷

Therefore, Mr. Hume and understood the reality that Indians might again be involved in a rebellions affairs and so he wanted to keep the Indian National Movement within the considerable limits of constitutional agitation. With this idea in mind, he made a plan to take some definite action to counteract the growing unrest in India towards the close of Lord Lytton's Viceroyalty.⁸

Mr. Hume thought that it would be better if the leading Indian politicians could be brought together once in a year to discuss political and social problems where Governors of provinces should be asked to preside over such annual discussions through which a greater cordiality would be established between the official classes and non - official Indian politicians.⁹

With this idea keeping in mind, he circulated an open letter to the Graduates of the Calcutta University on March, 1883 and he made an appeal to them to give their services voluntarily for the cause of nation. He also wanted Lord Dufferin's approval for his plans. Lord Dufferin himself advised and suggested that the Movement should have a political basis, on the ground that Government

needed a 'Loyal Opposition' which could function as safety-valve.¹⁰

Ram Gopal writes, "Lord Dufferin suggested that Indian leaders should meet yearly and point out to Government in what respects the administration was defective and how it could be improved, and that such an assembly should not be presided over by a Government official, for the people might not speak out their minds in his presence. Hume was convinced and so were the leading Indians whom he apprised with Lord Dufferin's scheme.... In March 1885 a circular letter was sent round notifying that 'a conference of the Indian National Union will be held at Poona from December 25 to 31, 1885', and that the 'conference will be composed to Delegates - leading politicians well-acquainted with the English language - from all parts of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras Presidencies'. (Later on the venue was changed from Poona to Bombay). The circular said that 'indirectly, this conference will form the germ of a National Parliament, and if properly conducted, will constitute in a few years an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions'. The projected gathering was described as 'the Conference of the Indian National Union', but a few days before the date fixed for the meeting, the name was changed, at the suggestion of Hume, to the 'Indian National Congress'. It was this Congress, which in the years to come was transformed into a revolutionary organization".¹¹

The Plans and objects of the Congress were as follows :-

To develop and promote personal intimacy and friendship amongst the members and workers in the country; to eradicate all possible religious, racial or provincial prejudices by direct friendly discussion; to work for the interest of the people etc.¹²

Gradually, Indian National Congress advanced and progressed and within four years of its birth the number of delegates increased to 1248 from 72.¹³

On the other hand, Sir Syed was highly engaged in his Aligarh College and he was not interested in any agitational activities and he kept himself away from joining the 'Indian National Congress'. He vehemently opposed its programme and ideology.

Sir Syed was busy to bringing about a better relation and understanding between the English rulers and the Musalmans and he never allowed to have any friction between them. He had full experience of the revolt of 1857 and feared that the same problem might again befall the Muslims if they entered into politics. According to Sir Syed, the salvation of the Muslim community lay in the attainment of higher English education. He wanted their abstention from any political agitation of the educated classes.¹⁴

Sir Syed's Politics is characterised by Loyalism,

whose basic parameters were five, fear, hope, appreciation, convenience and pragmatism.¹⁵ Sir Syed's Leadership had to deal with three major segments of society, the Muslims, the Hindus and the English, and he had to confront with three realities of the times, the global reality, the reality of the Islamic World and the reality of the Indian-sub-continent.¹⁶

As a matter of fact, the objectives and demands of the Indian National Congress were highly appreciated by the educated Indian middle class, be they Hindus or Muslims. But Sir Syed was disturbed because of this growing nationalism and tried to prove the loyalty of the Muslims to the British. For some time he maintained strict silence after the birth of the Congress but soon opposed it. This opposition of the Muhammadan Educational Conference of 1887 at Lucknow. He said ;

"It should be borne in mind that for a respected person to sit with the Viceroy in Council the essential requisite is the respectability of that person. Well the rich of our country tolerate that the members of Lower Classes, even though they may have B.A. and M.A. Degrees and may possess enough competence, should rule over them and control their property and possession ? Never, as no one would like it. The Membership of the Council is highly honourable and the Government is bound to give it to none except respected gentleman. The Viceroy can not address an ordinary person as 'my colleagues'

or 'my honourable colleagues' nor can he invite them to grand dinners and state functions in which great dignitaries like Dukes and Earls participate."¹⁷

When Sir Syed came to know in 1887 that the forthcoming session at Madras was to be presided by Badruddin Tayyabji, he could not remain silent and in order to combat the influence of the congress he set up the United Indian Patriotic Association in 1888 in which members of both communities could take part. The main object of it was to counter act the activities of the congress, to inform the British parliament of the steps being, taken all over India and moreover, to make the English understand that Muslims were not taking part in the Indian National Congress.¹⁸

On the other hand, Badruddin Tayyabji, wanted Sir Syed in the Indian National Congress. He tried to follow him and wrote a letter to him on 13th January 1888. The letter states as follows.

'I have not been able thoroughly to understand the grounds on which this abstention is sought to be justified but it does seem to me to be a great pity that on matters affecting all India as a whole, any section of the Mussalman community should keep aloof from the Hindus and thus retard the National Progress of India as a whole. I understand your objection to be that the Hindus being more advanced than ourselves would profit

more by any concessions made by Government....if any proposal is made which would subject the Mussalmans to the Hindus or would vest the exclusive power in Hindus to the detriment of the Mussalmans, I should oppose it with all my strength, but the Congress proposes to do not such things. Its aims are, and must be, for the benefit of all communities equally and any proposition that is disliked by the Mohamedans as a body must be excluded from it.¹⁹

Sir Syed was a man of deep insight and he regarded that Bengalis were dominated the congress and it seems it was their organisation. Sir Syed was not in favour of including elected representatives in the Council and its expansion. He also opposed the demand of the Congress that the competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service should be simultaneously held in India and England.²⁰ Sometime later Badruddin Tayyabji wrote another letter in 1888. He wrote :

'At the time when I wrote you I had not seen your speech at Lucknow. But I have since had an opportunity of reading it, and it is quite clear that at the time you delivered that speech, you were under the impression that the Congress was composed of Bengali Babus alone. How you should have got this idea passes my comprehension; for surely you could not have imagined that the Hindus of the Madras and the Bombay presidencies had not taken

an active part in it, even if you were unaware of the attitude of the educated Mussalmans of these presidencies towards the Congress. Be that as it may, the facts are that so far as Hindus are concerned they unanimously and as a body support the Congress no matter what province they belong to; and as to the Mussalmans, the presidencies of Bombay and Madras strongly support it, while in Bengal and North Western Provinces to judge from your speech there seems to be very considerable opposition to it.²¹

In spite of all these efforts, he could not change Sir Syed's attitude toward the Indian National Congress. Sir Syed replied to Badruddin Tayyabji and wrote a very long letter on 2nd April, 1888. A some important lines of the letter are as follows :

'I read in your paper, dated April 2nd, a letter from my distinguished friend Mr. Badruddin Tyabji, about the National Congress. I think it fit that I should myself write a reply to it, ... On my own behalf and on behalf of very many of our mutual co-religionists I thank him for this proceeding. I also agree with him in this-"that the Congress could not be rightly termed a National Congress where any particular resolution could be carried against the unanimous protest of either the Hindu or Mussalman delegate." But I go further : I first of all object to the word "delegate". I assure my friend that of the Mohammedans who went from the North Western Provinces and Oudh, there is not one to whom the word "delegate" can be

' I assure Mr. Hume that, even if I heard that Sir Auckland Colvin, Lord Dufferin, the Secretary of State for India and the whole House of Commons had declared in favour of the Congress I should remain as firmly opposed to it as ever, and I earnestly beg all the Mohammedans of India to be constant and determined in thier opposition, for it is my deliberate belief that should the resolution of National Congress be carried into effect, it would be impossible for British Government to preserve peace in India or control in any degree the violence of civil wars that would ensure. The resolution of the Congress on the subject of Arms Act would, of course, be of great assistance at such a crisis.'²³

Tufail Ahmad writes that some people believed and claimed Sir Syed fail under the influence of Principal, Theodore Back²⁴ but Back's influence on Sir Syed regarding the Indian National Congress was not true.²⁵

Sir Syed is new a controversial figure in modern India because of his attitude towards the Indian National Congress. From his abstention and aversion to the Indian National Congress it is argued that he was unpatriotic and hostile to Indian nationalism and finally drifted to communalism. A minute study of his speeches, writings and letters reveals that he was neither anti-national nor communalist. He was a nationalist, he considered India his home and in his opinion 'the Congress Movement

applied. I know well the condition of my own Province. Not ten Mohammedans came together to elect any one of those Mohammedans who went. In those districts from which they went there were not among the Raises and influential Mohammedans, nor among the middle classes, ten men who knew what the National Congress was, nor who had elected whom. Four days ago, a Mohammedan of liberal views, who went to Madras as a delegate, boasted that his glory lay in this : that the Hindus and not the Mohammedans, had elected him. Then how inappropriate and absurd to apply word "delegate" to Mohammedans under such circumstances ? Secondly, I object to the implication that the only condition under which the Congress cannot be termed "national" is if any resolution be carried against the unanimous protest of either the Hindu or the Mohammedan members. The fact of any resolution being carried unanimously does not make the Congress a "national" one. A Congress can only be called "national" when the ultimate aims and objects of the people of which it is composed are identical!²²

Infact, Badruddin Tayyabji wanted the solution of the Muslim problems through politics while Sir Syed wanted them through education.

Sir Syed was also not agree with Mr. Hume as a letter of Sir Syed to the editor of the Pioneer dated 10th Nov. 1888 reveals the fact. The letter states :

had been started a little earlier and prematurely. Muslims were educationally and socially backward and retarded and so was the case with other communities of India.²⁶

At the outset, the congress was not an All India organisation. Infact, the congress of 1885 was formed by some handful English educated persons from Presidency Provinces. He did not think that the whole country could be benefited.²⁷

The basic problem was not political but economic.²⁸ The point is that a bourgeoisie class had developed in Bombay, Madras and Bengal while in northern India this class did not come into existence.²⁹ This was the reason that the Muslims living in the three provinces of port areas had joined and supported the congress. As a bourgeoisie class developed among Muslims. It was also observed that they attended the sessions of the Congress and presided over them.³⁰ But on the other hand, there was no response from the northern part of India and it is obvious that the Muslims of that area had not developed a bourgeoisie class. They were still tied up with feudalism and anti-democratic ideology while non-Muslim middle class of any part of the country had begun to think on the line of western liberalism. Sir Syed held the view that both the demands of the congress i.e. holding of competitive examination and elected representatives in the Council and its expansion - were not concerned with the interest of the minority people of the country.³¹

It should also be mentioned that Sir Syed was neither jealous of non-Muslims nor did he aim at retarding their progress, he was aware of the fact that Hindus and Muslims were the two wheels of the country's vehicle and it should maintain its balance and equilibrium.^{31A}

Sir Syed observed that the conditions of the two communities were different. One had enjoyed prosperity and education for about a century and the other community had suffered a century of ignorance and suppression. The result was that they could not avail the situation alike. Sir Syed had firm faith that any political agitation would harm both the communities.³²

Jawaharlal Nehru in his 'The Discovery of India', he rightly remarks that Syed Ahmad "was not opposed to the Indian National Congress because he considered it predominantly a Hindu organisation; he opposed it because he thought it was politically too aggressive".³³

Sir Syed thought that the Muslims could progress only with the support of the British Government and the acceptance of western modern education. It is interesting to note that he not only opposed the Indian National Congress but also the National Mohammedan Association founded by Syed Ameer Ali of Calcutta in 1877 who felt the urgency of political organisation.³⁴ While Sir Syed felt that education was needed for the eradication of all kinds of evils from the Muslim Society.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Misra, B.B. The Indian Middle Classes - their Growth in the Modern Times, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, P.11
2. Ibid, P. 17
3. Gopal, Ram How India Struggled for Freedom: A Political History, Bombay: The Book Centre Private Limited, 1967, P.43.
4. Dutt, Rajni Palme India Today and Tomorrow, Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1955, P.115
5. Wedderburn, William Allan Octavian Hume, New Delhi: Pegasus, 1913, P.2
6. Loc. cit
7. Gopal, Ram Lok Nayak Tilak, Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1956. P.12
8. Wedderburn, William Op. cit. P. 50
9. The Indian National Congress, Part II, Madras : G.A. Natesan & Co. 1885, P. 14.
10. Gunther, John Insid Asia, London : Hamish Hamilton 1939, P. 447.
11. Gopal, Ram How India Struggled for Freedom, Op. cit. P. 57
12. The Indian National Congress, Pt. 1, Op. cit.
13. Banerji, Surendra Nath A Nation in Making, Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1925, P. 109.

14. Manglori, Tufail Ahmad Musalmanau Ka Roshan Mustaqbil, Delhi: Kutub Khana Aziziya, 1938, 1945, P. 297.
15. Ali, B. Sheikh A Leader Reassessed, Mysore: Sultan Shaheed Educational Trust Publication 1999. P. 188.
16. Ibid, PP. 190-191
17. Ahmad, Munshi Sirajuddin (edited) Majmua Lectures Ha-e-Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Sadhora : Bilali Press, 1890 PP. 298-299, see Sir Syedi Lecture at Lucknow, 28 December, 1887.
18. Hali, Altaf Hussain Hayat-i-Javed, Knapur, 1991, P.70
19. Source material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India collected from Bombay Government Records Vol. II, 1885-1930, Published in 1958. P. 68
20. Muhammad, Shan (edited) Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Bombay : Nachiketa Publications, 1972, PP. 180-195
21. Source material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India, Op.cit, PP. 72-73.
22. Muhammad, Shan (edited) Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Op. cit. PP.240-241.
23. Ibid, P. 252
24. Manglori, Tufail Ahmad Mussalmanon Ka Rohsan Mustaqbil, Badayaun, 1938, PP.299-300

25. Muhammad, Shan Writings and Speeches, OP. cit,
(edited) PP. 180-195
26. The Aligarh Institute Gazette, Aligarh, 5th July, 1887.
27. Ahmad, Munshi Majmna Lecture Ha-e-Sir Syed Ahmad
Sirajuddin(ed) Khan, Sadhora Bilali Press, 1890, 1892
PP. 311-315.
28. Smith, W.C. Modern Islam in India : A Social
Analysis, London : 1946, P.28
29. Ibid, P. 28
30. Ibid, P. 28
31. Ahmad, Munshi Majmna Lectures, Op.cit,
Sirajuddin(ed) PP. 150-151
(Sir Syed speech at Patna 27, January,
1883.)
- 31A. Ibid, PP. 150-151
32. Hali, Altaf Hayat-i-Javed, Part-I, Op.cit, P.238
Hussain
33. Nehru, J. The Discovery of India, Calcutta, 1946
PP. 410-412
34. Masood, Syed Ross Khutoot-e-Sir Syed, Badaun : Nizami
(edited) Press, 1924, P. 276 (Sir Syed's
letter dated 10th December, 1888,
Aligarh).