

## **The Idea of Aligarh Muslim University: Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Vision of a University and Beyond**

- **Abdulrahim P. Vijapur**

### **Abstract**

*The MAO College and AMU have played a significant role during the last 150 years in awakening and rekindling Indian Muslims from their deep slumber and narrow and orthodox thinking. It uplifted them intellectually and morally to be the partners in nation building. It has taken an important part in shaping the history of the Indian Muslims. It has emerged, since its inception, as a beacon of hope for Muslims, women, other minority groups, and the less privileged. However, the present academic health of the university and the conditions of Indian Muslims is not very sound. This paper makes a journey from the idea of AMU, the vision of Sir Sayyid, prevailing decline, its reasons, remedial measures and the road ahead.*

**“Ignorance is the mother of poverty. When a nation becomes devoid of arts and learning, it invites poverty and when poverty comes, it brings in its wakes thousands of crimes”. (Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan)**

### **Introduction**

Muhammadan-Anglo Oriental College (MAO College), established in 1877, which was elevated as Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 1920, is one of the most important academic institutions in India. Since its inception it sought to promote a broad humanism, a liberal outlook, and a scientific worldview. In the latter part of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, the majority of Muslim India's intellectual and political leaders received their education at Aligarh. They were very active in the freedom struggle and the 1920s Khilafat Movement (Ahmad 1979: 62). AMU celebrated its centenary in 2020. It is time to reflect on the ideals on which it was founded and the realities in which it has been functioning.

Lord Lytton, then Viceroy of India, while laying the foundation-stone of the MAO College described it as “an epoch in the social progress of India” (Bhatnagar 2020: xi). Several decades later Sir Hamilton Gibb characterized the college as “the first modernist institution in Islam” (cited in Wajihuddin 2021: 100). Mahatma Gandhi regarded Sir Sayyid as a “Prophet of Education” (Hanif vol.1 2020: 14). Barbara D. Metcalf writes that “Sir Syed was the father of Muslim Intellectual Renaissance” (Hanif vol.1 2020: 15).

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Altaf Hussain Hali viewed Sir Syed as the inaugurator of a new, modernized Islam (Troll, 1978: 15). Great poet and philosopher, Sir Mohammad Iqbal while recognizing the importance of AMU for Muslims remarked: “Few institutions in the history of modern Islam have had such deep and far-reaching impact on the intellectual and cultural life of the Muslims as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan ... It heralded a new era of intellectual and cultural renaissance for Muslims not only in India, but the whole of Asia" (cited in Haque 2017: 50) Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, “Sir Syed was an ardent reformer and he wanted to reconcile modern scientific thought with religion by rationalistic interpretations and not by attacking basic belief. He was anxious to push new education. He was in no way communally separatist. Repeatedly he emphasized that religious differences should have no political and national significance” .Sir Sayyid’s legacy for Indian Muslims has been closely linked to the fortunes of AMU (cited in Hanif vol. 1: 15; Saikia & Rahman 2019: 272). Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India’s first education Minister, opined “[t]he inscription which has been carved on the walls of your Strachey Hall may fade with passage of time, but the inscription which Aligarh has written on the modern period of Indian history can never fade. Future historians will discover in Aligarh one of the main sources which has contributed to the evolution of modern India” (Hanif vol. 1 2020: 16).

In Rajmohan Gandhi’s view “With the launching of MAO College, Syed Ahmad was seen as a national figure and a leader of the Indian Muslims” (Gandhi 1987: 35). While delivering convocation address in AMU, Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, remarked that Sir Syed’s MAO College/ AMU has taken an important part in shaping the history of the Indian Muslims (Siddiqui & Abrar 2017: 131). In fact, Sir Syed was not only a link between the unhappy past of the decaying Mughal Empire and the great future of Indians but also a link between the British and Indians. Govind Ballabh Pant remarks that “[t]he founder of MAO College was one of the most eminent Indians ever born. Sir Syed was gifted with a powerful mind. He stood for tolerance, reason, scientific outlook and freedom of thought against bigotry, fanaticism and narrow sectarianism” (Hanif vol. 1 2020: 17). Professor Ale Ahmad Suroor (Sahitya Academy award recipient) aptly remarked: “Sir Syed’s Movement should be viewed as a comprehensive effort for modernization, scientific temper, social uplift and educational advancement” (Hanif vol. 1 2020: 16). The Lebanese Christian scholar, Jurji Zaidan, was one of the earliest Arabs to recognize that Sir Sayyid undertook the role of advancing cultural and educational upliftment of Muslims in India. To him, Sir Sayyid’s main achievement was to wean away his co-religionists from cultural opposition to the west, and demonstrating them that modern western science was not hurtful to their religion (Troll 1978: 13).

MAO College/AMU has produced illustrious alumni some of who fought for national freedom, became Presidents, Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers, Chief Justices, Bollywood stars, film makers, bureaucrats, writers / poets, entrepreneurs, and academic administrators. The list of such alumni is very long. Let us mention some of them here: Khan Adul Gaffar

Khan, the frontier Gandhi and Dr. Zakir Hussain, former President of India – both were awarded Bhart Ratna. Others include, Raja Mahendra Pratap, Hasarat Mohani (Member of Constituent Assembly), Maulana Mohd. Ali Johar, Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Ayub Khan (President of Pakistan), Liaqat Ali Khan (Prime Minister of Pakistan), Ahmed Said Khan of Chatari (Prime Minister of Hyderabad), Mohammad Amin Didi (former President of Maldives), Mansoor Ali (Prime Minister of Bangladesh), Mohd. Hameedullah Khan (Ruler, Princely State of Bhopal). Bollywood was dominated by Begum Para, Begum Khurshid Mirza (actress known as Renuka Devi), K. A. Abbas, Naseeruddin Shah, Shakeel Badauni, Sadat Hasan Manto, Talat Mahmood, Jawed Akhtar, Muzaffar Ali, Sir Saeed Jafri, Rahi Masoom Raza, Akhturul Iman, Vaibhav Sinha, Habib Tanweer, Shaheed Lateef, Surekha Sikri, and Dilip Tahil. Three of its alumni – Ali Sardar Jafri, Qurratul Ain Hyder, and Shahryar received Jnanpith award.

Since 1980s very few alumni have distinguished themselves in their chosen field of profession. There has been a continuous decline of academic standards and the university is producing non-employable graduates. The purpose of this paper is to find out reasons of this state of affairs and to suggest remedial measures to regain its lost glory.

## **II. Compelling Reasons for Establishment of AMU in Sir Sayyid's View**

There were six reasons for Sir Sayyid's decision to lay the foundation of MAO College. First, The Revolt of 1857, India's First War of independence, led to the decline of Muslim political power, and made Indians subjugated to British imperial power, especially the Muslims. He realized with a vision that nothing could resuscitate Muslim political power. He lamented that Muslims were illiterate, conservative, and orthodox. When he launched his movement (later called the Aligarh Movement) for the intellectual and social uplift of the people, he found the traditional system of Muslim education as a great stumbling block in their way of progress. There was reluctance to accept Western/modern science education and technology which had brought progress and prosperity. Sir Sayyid articulated that ignorance of English language and modern knowledge is the cause of Muslim's continued downfall. He explained to his community people that there is no harm in adopting Western sciences and in learning English language if it rises to the heights of success. He had a firm belief that and technology is the only solution for the problem of Muslims. In one of the lectures Sir Sayyid stated that the main reason behind the establishment of this institution was the wretched dependence of Muslims, which had been debasing their position day after day. Their religious fanaticism did not let them avail the educational facilities provided by the government schools and colleges. It was, therefore, deemed necessary to make some special arrangement for their education (Nizami 1974: 9). He further clarified that MAO College was not for Muslim students alone. It was for the students of both Muslim and Hindu communities. He philosophically explains the inspiring spirit behind his efforts to start the college by giving an example of two brothers:

Suppose, for example, there are two brothers, one [Hindu] of them is quite hale and hearty but the other [Muslim] is diseased. His health is on the decline. Thus, it is the duty of all brothers to take care of their ailing brother and bear the hands in his trouble. This was the very idea which goaded me to establish the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College. But I am pleased to say that both the brothers [Hindus and Muslims] get the same education in this college (cited in Nizami 1974: 9).

Second, after 1857war, Indian Muslims were going through difficult times. They hated English language and culture. They were keeping their children away from schools. This attitude made them backward. Sir Sayyid recognised the intellectual difficulties that Islamic learning faced in addition to the practical need for English instruction in his society. Because modern knowledge of the arts and sciences was only available in the English language at the time, he attempted to persuade the Muslim scholars of his day to study the language. But they fiercely disagreed with his suggestions to learn modern/western sciences. He argued that in past, Muslims studied Greek language and translated Greek classics of Aristotle and Plato into Arabic, then how can one remain intolerant and insensitive towards English. He wrote at one place that Persian, at its early stage, was the language of fire worshipers but Muslims have adopted it in such a manner that it has now become their language. He argued that by learning English language you could not be said to have adopted to religious and cultural ideas of Britishers.

Third, the establishment of the Scientific Society in 1863 to undertake the translation of Western classics, books of Mathematics, History into Urdu language and to organize scientific debates on contemporary issues was highly successful. The activities of the Scientific Society needed to be continued in the College he desired to establish. He wanted this college to act as a bridge between the old and the new, the East and the West. He wanted Muslims to acquire modern Western knowledge without undermining the Oriental learning, values and the rich legacy of the past.

Fourth, the interaction between Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mirza Ghalib was another important reason for Sir Sayyid's interest in launching the educational movement. In 1855, Sir Sayyid finished his scholarly, well-researched edition of Abul Fazal's *Aine Akbari*. He approached Ghalib to write a Foreword to his book. Ghalib obliged, but what he produced was a short Persian poem castigating the *Aine Akbari* and, by implication, the Imperial, sumptuous, literate, and learned Mughal culture of which it was a product. In Ghalib's view the book had little value. In fact, he practically reprimanded Sir Sayyid for wasting his time and talents on dead things. Worse, he highly praised the "Sahibs of England " who at that time held all the keys to all the *Ains* (Constitutions) in this world (Faruqi 2006: p. 13). Though Sir Sayyid did not include the Foreword by Ghalib in the book, he gave up active interest in history and archaeology and became a social reformer and founded the Aligarh Movement preaching Indian Muslims to learn Western Sciences and knowledge.

Fifth, by graduating from MAO College, Muslims could secure services and employment in the British government. He was well aware that amongst the Hindus the movement for Western education had already been initiated, fifty years ahead of Sir Sayyid's efforts, by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen and the initial hurdles having been removed, a favourable climate was already created. He pioneered the same for Muslim community after 1857.

Sixth, the 1842 decision of the British government to replace Persian with English as the language of administration and as the language of Courts of Law caused deep anxiety among Muslims of the sub-continent. This made Sir Sayyid realize that if Muslims want to secure government employment, they should learn or study in English instead of studying in vernacular languages. Moreover, in 1871, Urdu was removed by ordinance in Bengal and Bihar by describing it, in the words of Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, as a "bastard hybrid language" (Hasan 2006:24). Also, in the 1860s, there arose a language controversy between Hindi and Urdu in north India. Due to these two decisions on language replacement, he saw a need for Muslims to acquire proficiency in the English language and Western sciences if the community were to maintain its social and political clout, particularly in Northern India. He began to prepare the foundation for the formation of a Muslim University by starting schools at Moradabad (1858) and Ghazipur (1863).

### **III. Sir Sayyid's Conception of a University**

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's conception of a university was unique and unparalleled. His proposed university aimed for the upliftment of Indian Muslims, but its doors were open for everyone, be they Hindus, Christians, or Sikhs. He advocated Hindu-Muslim and Shia-Sunni Unity on the campus, moral and religious development of students, recruitment of meritorious teachers, secular course curriculum, English as medium of Instruction, residential in character, and non-interference by government were other significant features of his educational institution. Let us elaborate these features.

#### **(i) University for Everyone: Hindu-Muslim Unity**

MAO College, now AMU, was undoubtedly Muslim but was not for Muslims alone. Hindus were welcome to join it as day scholars and boarders and were assured exemption from the rules and religious courses mandatory for Muslims. To win Hindu confidence Sayyid Ahmad forbade the slaughter of cows on the campus (Rajmohan Gandhi 1987: 34). In 1887 three of the managing committee members were Hindus out of 11 members. In 1894 two of the seven Indian teachers were Hindus. It was interesting to note that in some of the early years of the college Hindu students even outnumbered Muslim ones. Sir Sayyid said "that Hindus and Mussalmans are equally entitled to get scholarships" in MAO. When in 1882 some Muslim scholars of Amritsar offered a gold medal to a Muslim student who passed the B.A. examination in the first division, he immediately wrote to the Principal of MAO College: "I offer a gold medal from his own pocket to the Hindu student who may pass

the next B.A. examination in the first division” (cited in Nizami 1974: 148; Bhatnagar 2019: 28). Prof. K.A. Nizami remarked in this regard that throughout his life, Sayyid Ahmad Khan stood for Hindu-Muslim amity and strove for the betterment of the Indian people as a whole (Ibid.). Sir Sayyid further said:

All rights of the college pertaining to those who call themselves Muslims are equally related to those who call themselves Hindus without any reservations. There is no distinction whatsoever between Hindus and Muslims. Only one who strives hard can lay claim to get the award. Here in this college Hindus as well as Muslims are entitled to get the stipends and both of them are treated at par as boarders. I regard both Hindus and Muslims as my two eyes [italics added] (Nizami 1974: 9).

In fact, on Hindu-Muslim unity Sir Sayyid once said: “Now both of us live on the air of India, drink the holy water of Ganga and Jamuna, we both feed upon the products of the Indian soil ... we both belong to the same country, we are one nation ....” (Ahmad 2005: 8). Thus, it is worth recalling here the words of Shyam Benegal, an eminent film maker who said in his Sir Sayyid memorial lecture: “Sir Syed single-handedly introduced modern education in the Muslim community and was one of the greatest votaries of Hindu-Muslim unity. He was a secularist well before the term became common currency a century later” (Hanif vol. 1 2020: 17).

Sir Sayyid’s MAO College followed the policy of inclusiveness of students. Although it was predominantly established for promoting Western/modern scientific education among Muslims of India, it admitted students from all communities. In fact, Sir William Hunter’s comment testifies this; as he wrote: “Among the 259 students I find 57 Hindus or nearly a fourth of the whole. Christian and Parsi lads have also received a liberal education within its walls. This liberality of mind pervades not only its rules and its teaching, but the whole life of this place” (Nizami 1974: 147). Addressing the 1904 Mohammadan Educational Conference, Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar draws an interesting contrast of Sir Sayyid’s secularism with that practiced by famous British colleges, like Keble, Hartford and Magdalene, which did not admit non-Christian students even as late as the beginning of the 20th century. Co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in the College on terms of equality continued during his lifetime and continues till this day (Bhatnagar 2020: 28-29). This proves that secular values governed its admissions.

Participating in Centenary celebration of AMU in December 2020, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi said: “AMU alumni are spread across the world and take a lot of pride in their alma mater. Their pride is justified. In 100 years of its existence, AMU has crafted and polished millions of lives, giving them modern and scientific thinking and inspiring them to do something for society and the nation. Its campus is like a city in itself. We see a mini-India among different departments, dozens of hostels, thousands of teachers and professors. The diversity which we see here is not only the strength of this university but also of the entire nation” (*Times of India*, 22 December 2021).



Hindu-Muslim unity is also reflected in donations received from persons belonging to both communities. When the campaign for collecting funds for MAO College began, a large number of his Hindu friends contributed to it. The Rajas of Benaras, Vizyanaram and Patiala made generous contributions to the college fund (Nizami 1974: 70). It is interesting to note that the Maharaja of Alwar donated in 1926 Rs. 8000/ per annum for five years to fund the Department of Theology, which teaches only Sunni and Shia theology (Ahmad 2005: 49). Raja Jai Kishan, the Prime Minister of Hyderabad. also gave a donation to the college. Mir Osman Ali Khan, the last Nizam of Hyderabad, donated Rs. 10 lakhs to Banaras Hindu University, Rs. 5 lakhs to AMU and Rs. 3 lakhs to Indian Institute of Science. British officers and Parsis (Zoroastrians) also gave donations. Thus, AMU should be considered as belonging to all Indians rather than to Muslim community alone.

### **(ii) Sunni-Shia Unity**

Sir Sayyid established the Department of Theology in MAO College and the Sunni and Shia theology both are taught till this day. AMU Central Mosque is one of the few mosques in the Indian sub-Continent in which Sunnis and Shias both offer prayer.

### **(iii) Residential and Religious Milieu**

Sir Sayyid's vision was to emulate the Oxford-Cambridge (Oxbridge) model of education in his Aligarh College where students could study and live at the same place (Kidwai and Gupta 2020). The College was equipped with dormitory-style accommodations, where hostel authorities provided all furniture, even bedding and servants, so that students do not bring anything from home. Actually, Sir Sayyid insisted on students remaining on campus, away from their homes, during the whole term. The reason behind this was that he was convinced that "parental affection generally marred the progress of these boys". In the college their residential life will be monitored by teacher-wardens so that their life is not severely impacted from outside influences which might impede their studies. Moreover, the residential places will have students from other communities – Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Parsis. This arrangement was considered as a good milieu where students will learn to live with each other respecting their divergent religions, languages and cultures.

Another most striking aim of the University was to provide education for moral and cultural development. It did not aim at producing only the scholars and skilled people to join government services, but its aim was to build the character of the students. If we read Sir Sayyid's speeches and writings, we find that what pained him most was not ignorance or illiteracy, but lack of character amongst Indians. Therefore, he insisted on the character building of his students as much as he stressed on learning western sciences. "Syed Ahmad's ideal was", remarks Maulana Mohammad Ali, leader of Khilafat and non-Cooperation Movements along with Mahatma Gandhi "[to produce in the College] a gentleman rather than a scholar". To say that he merely wanted to create clerks for the government is farther from the truth. In fact, he wanted to create an enlightened nation, educated, cultured and

progressive (Nizami 1974: 143-44). He further said, Sir Sayyid “resolved upon creating in India a university, not of the existing type of Indian universities, but like the typical English institutions of Oxford and Cambridge, for grooming the future statesmen, generals, and poets who will be shaping unconsciously their destinies, and perhaps the destinies of more than one country” (Nizami 1974: 143).

He emphasized on both *talim* (knowledge or formal education) and *tarbiyat* (character building), i.e., to be something conducive of “upbringing of children, in such a manner that they [would] grow up to be humane, just, honest, self-respecting, and dutiful. While education signals a path to a bright and cheerful future, its value would be nullified without a gentle and benevolent culture and the civic virtues, which he regarded as the moral basis of a community” (Saikia & Rahman 2019: 121). According to Sir Sayyid, the aim of MAO College was “to form a class of persons, Muhammadan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect” (Belmekki, 2009: 170). To achieve this aim of creating morally sound graduates he made teaching of Islam/religion compulsory for Muslim students (Hindu students were exempted from this), praying five times a day was also made compulsory to instil discipline among students. The British Principals of MAO College strictly implemented these provisions. Also, Sir Sayyid started publishing a journal known as *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq* (Social Reformer) in this regard. Launched in 1970, it was a journal for the social reformation of Indian Muslims. Thus, the Aligarh Movement was lauded by Lord Curzon for fostering an institution, MAO College, with a unique ‘esprit de corps’ in which the cultivation of student ‘character’ was as important as mental training (Ivermee 2017: 99).

For the moral development of students and for inculcating discipline among them, MAO College must have mosques attached to each residential Hall or College/ University, like Cambridge and Oxford had churches which were attended regularly by students for prayers. British Principals of the College religiously implemented the rule of five times prayers. They thought it was making students disciplined and responsible not to disturb law and order of the campus. Offering five times prayers was mandatory for Muslim residents only. Sir Sayyid considered an education without religious instruction to be a body without soul. Smoking of cigarettes or Hookah was not allowed. Use of bad or abusive words was strictly prohibited. Meals were to be served at fixed timings.

#### **(iv) Recruiting teachers on merit/qualifications**

MAO College / AMU in the initial period recruited excellent and highly qualified Indian and foreign scholars on its faculty. Professor D.D. Kosambi, Prof. K.M. Pannikar, Madhav Menon, Prof. Nurul Hasan (former Education Minister, Government of India & Governor of Odisha and West Bengal), Professor Satish Chandra (former Chairman, UGC); Altaf Hussain Hali, Haroon Khan Sherwani, Babar Mirza, Zakir Husain, Ghulam Sayyedein, Mohammad Habib, Hadi Hasan, Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah, Amlendu Bose, and Mumtaz Jehan Hyder were stalwarts among its Indian faculty members. It also appointed many



foreign scholars as faculty members. For instance, the English Department alone had six British teachers: Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Theodore Morrison, F.J. Fielden, Hadow Harris, Firebrace and E.C. Dickinson. Dr. H. Lessheim (Mathematics) and T.W. Arnold (Philosophy) were other teachers. Eminent historian Arnold Toynbee had recommended to AMU Vice Chancellor (Ross Masood) the appointment of Wilhelm Hass on AMU Staff (Hasan 2006: 180). On Albert Einstein's recommendation, Ross Masood, appointed Rudolph Samuel in the Faculty of Science. Also, a European scientist Dr.R.F. Hunter was appointed in the Department of Chemistry (Hasan 2006: p.176). Other eminent European teachers included C.A. Storey, Wallas, Purves, and Horovitz (Bhatnagar 2020: xxi). Two Vice Chancellors, Aftab Ahmad Khan and Sir Ross Masood, strived to make AMU a centre of excellence by appointing faculty members purely on the basis of their merit.

It is worth recalling that on the recommendation of Sir Sayyid and his son, Justice Syed Mahmood, except one, all the Principals of MAO College were Britishers. These were: Henry George Impey Siddons (1877-1884), Theodore Beck (1884 -1899), Sir Theodore Morison (1899 -1905), William Archbold (1905 -1909), J. H. Towle (1909 -1919), and Sir Ziauddin Ahmad (1919 -1920). The last principal, an Indian, was the longest serving Pro-Vice Chancellor (26 March 1921 -27 April 1928) and Vice Chancellor of AMU (April 1941 – April 1947), and had a brilliant academic record. He earned MA degree from Calcutta University and D.Sc. in Mathematics from Allahabad University, besides obtaining his honours degree in mathematics from Cambridge University and Ph.D. from Gottingen University, Germany.

#### **(v) Secular course curriculum**

Sir Sayyid wanted the MAO College to adopt a secular curriculum to reflect it as a East-West bridge. A second language (Persian, Arabic, Latin, Greek, or Sanskrit) was mandatory, but English was emphasized. Most chose Persian; after 1885, Arabic was dropped. Subjects included logic, mathematics, rhetoric, psychology, philosophy, history (mainly British history), political economy, chemistry and physics (after 1894, these were taught on the B.Sc. track), and law (postgraduate after 1894). From 1887, students could also prepare to enter Roorkee Engineering College. Annual examinations were taken in college; for finals, students travelled to Calcutta and Allahabad. Sir Sayyid Ahmad thought “learning through sports, club membership, and residential life was more important than taking tests. The aim was to produce Muslim leaders, English in taste and morals, Muslim in religion, and Indian in blood and colour, Khan's adaptation of Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 minute on Indian education [emphasis added]” (Bennett 2018: 55-56). Although several professors had Deoband links, for some Muslims M.A.O. College's religious instruction was too liberal; for others academic excellence was undervalued, and thus financial support came from Khan's friends and admirers. Academic achievement was initially mediocre, although it improved and excelled over a period of time.

#### (vi) Non-interference by Government

The most important principle which embedded Sir Sayyid's conception of the MAO College/University was the autonomy of the institution. While he was eager to enlist support of the British Government for his educational initiative, he was unwilling to put the college management under government control. Again and again, he stressed the point that it was necessary to keep education beyond the pale of the Government. The detailed scheme prepared by his son, Sayyid Mahmud in 1873, for the establishment of a university, included six principles on which this proposed institution would be built. First of them was that "the management of this institution shall be perfectly free from any control of the Government, beyond mere supervision" (Nizami 1974: 66 & 70).

To sum up the vision of Sir Sayyid's concept of a university one should recall here his last Message, which reads:

*Oh my dear Students,*

*You have reached a particular stage and remember one thing that when I undertook the task, there was criticism all around against me, abuses were hurled upon me, life had become so difficult for me that I aged before my age. I lost my hair, my eyesight, but not my vision. My vision never dimmed. My determination never failed. I built this institution [MAO College, which later became AMU] for you and I am sure, you will carry the light of this institution far and wide till darkness will disappear from all around. Sons [of the institute] shall go forth throughout the length and breadth of the land to preach the message of free inquiry, of large-hearted toleration and of pure morality [italics added] (Hanif Vol. I 2021: p.46).*

#### IV. Problems and Challenges of AMU

At the outset, it can be said that AMU has a glorious past and precarious present (Wajihuddin 2021: 99-119; Maheshwai 2001). Despite the kind of national or international attention it received from colonial and post-colonial administration of Government of India and the applauses it received from statesmen, scholars, academics, and four Nobel Laureates who visited Aligarh (C.V. Raman, Abdus Salam, Sir Alexander Todd and Dalai Lama), it has not emerged as a "Cambridge or Oxford of India" or the "Mecca of higher education in India", except for initial five to six decades of its history. Many Viceroys, Governor-Generals of British India, Prime Ministers or Presidents or monarchs of many countries, including Indian Prime Ministers, Presidents, Chief Ministers and Governors of Indian States, had paid visits to AMU and praised it. The first lady of the United States, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, had also visited AMU in 1952. The reasons for its subsequent academic decline, especially after independence, are not far to seek. We briefly discuss here some of the problems it faced since its inception.

First, in 1885, Sir Sayyid received a shock when he learnt (in the evening of his life) that the head clerk of the College forged his signatures and those of other trustees and drew

from the bank, on different occasions an amount of Rs. 1,05,570, a huge amount then. He felt completely broken down as a result of this unfortunate incident (Nizami 1974: 131; Kidwai 2021: 52). Even today the University is faced with complaints of financial irregularities or appointments of unqualified persons in teaching and administrative posts. For example, the VC, Mr. Zameeruddin Shah, had appointed his Registrar, who was not possessing the required post-graduate degree. Moreover, the post of Registrar was never advertised nor a Selection Committee to appoint the officer was held. Premier investigating agency, Central Bureau of Investigation, has investigated many irregularities committed by the last three Vice Chancellors, but never recommended any punishment.

Second, the University faced a serious problem after the partition of India. Many teachers and competent staff started leaving Aligarh for Pakistan. Even the V.C. Zahid Hussain, ICS and Finance Minister of Nizam, appointed in April 1947, resigned within three and half months and left for Pakistan. Students from Punjab stopped coming to Aligarh for their studies. The migration of the elite class from U.P., Bihar and the Indian side of Punjab to Pakistan affected its enrollment. Moreover, the golden period of AMU of the 1930s and 1940s came to an end and the Aligarh Movement became weak.

Third, AMU today is inflicted with nepotism and irregularities in appointments of Faculty members or administrative officers. Very few scholars from outside AMU succeed in securing appointments. This can be buttressed by citing the findings of Sir Ibrahim Rahmatullah Enquiry Committee ordered, in 1927, by Governor General in his capacity as Lord Rector of AMU to enquire into many irregularities in appointments of faculty members in breach of the Act and Ordinances and other matters. The Committee was composed of four members: Sir Rahmattullah (Chairman), Sir Philip Hartog (Member), member of Public Service Commission, Sir George Anderson (Member), Director of Education, Punjab, and A.F. Rahman (Secretary to the Committee), Provost of the Muslim Hall in Dacca University. The Committee submitted its Report in September 1927. Among many findings of the Enquiry Committee, we are mentioning here only those concerned with irregularities in the matter of appointments of faculty members and other officers. The report admitted that rules and regulations were not followed while making appointments of teachers and in promoting some of them. The report revealed from the signed first list by the Registrar that out of 40 appointments on the list 19 had been without the recommendation of the Appointment Committee. In the second list only a small number of such appointments was shown. The Committee further revealed that a number of appointments were made by promotion and confirmed by Executive Council without previous approval as to whether the higher post was required or not, without defining the conditions of post, without advertisement and without holding a Selection Committee to consider qualifications of the persons promoted. The Enquiry Committee recommended that this practice should be discontinued. It registered strong objection to the appointment of Honorary readers without taking experts' advice upon the qualification in the subject of Readership. The Committee thought that advertisement

should be issued before any permanent teaching post was filled. It also suggested that a Reader (Associate Professor) should not be appointed as Head if there was a Professor in the Department. Honorary Readers should not be eligible to act as Head of the Department. The Committee found that the present Medical Officer in addition to his duties in that capacity was also Chairman of the Department of Zoology and had been recently appointed as Principal of Tibbiya College. The Committee recommended that in order to discharge his duties efficiently, the Medical Officer of the University would be a full-time officer (Ahmad 2005: pp.75-76).

There is more to it. The 1961 Report of the AMU Enquiry (Professor G.C. Chatterji Committee), constituted by the Executive Council of AMU on the direction of Ministry of Education, Government of India, provides examples of many irregularities in matters of appointments of both teaching and non-teaching staff. The terms and reference of the committee were to: (a) enquire into the financial transaction of the university from 1951-52 till date, with special reference to the audit objections relating to the accounts of these years and steps, if any, taken by university to address these objections; (b) enquire into the recruitment, appointment and promotion of teaching and administrative staff of the university and the admission of students to the university during these years; and (c) suggest measures of reform necessary for the efficient functioning of the university.

According to this report Professor Satish Chandra, eminent historian of Medieval India, became a victim of university politics. He was working as Reader in AMU (between 1953-1962). He was recommended by a Selection Committee held during the session 1959-60 for the post of Professor, but unfortunately could not be appointed to the post due to representation made by K.A. Nizami and the politics of recruitment. It must be noted that the enquiry Committee found the representation against this recommended appointment to be quite unfounded and ridiculous (Report of AMU Enquiry 1961:91-101). It is worth noting that Satish Chandra became one of the founding Professors (along with Professor Sarvapalli Gopal and Romila Thapar) of the Centre for Historical Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University and subsequently became Vice Chairman and Chairman of University Grants Commission!

The Enquiry Committee report expressed its displeasure on the practice of inbreeding prevailing in the appointments of teaching and non-teaching staff members of the university. The Committee was of the view that inbreeding results in stagnation and retards growth (Report of AMU Enquiry 1961: 77).

This report noted another irregularity committed by AMU in appointing Assistant Registrar (Academic) (AR) in 1954. The appointment of AR was found by the Enquiry Report not regular because the Selection Committee which appointed Deputy Registrar recommended appointment of AR for the consequential vacancy. This was, the report stated, irregular as the post should have been filled on a regular basis after advertisement through a duly constituted Selection Committee. The Selection Committee which appointed him was

originally constituted for selection to the post of Deputy Registrar in the University (Report of AMU Enquiry 1961: 83). The Enquiry Report mentions another serious case of the appointment of accounts Clerk. The incumbent was formerly employed in the office of the District Judge, Badaun, and was dismissed from service for the theft of some original depositions from the file of a sessions trial. A few months after his dismissal (in May 1951), he applied for the post of a clerk in the office of AMU. He made no mention in his application about his previous service at Badaun. Two years after he joined AMU a report was made to the university regarding his dismissal from government service. The university verified the information, but did not take any action against him for suppression of this vital information. The factual information was simply placed on his personal file. It appears that at the time of his recruitment he had not been asked to state past experience, etc. he was confirmed on his post (Report of AMU Enquiry 1961: 84).

Fourth, the existing procedure of appointing the Vice Chancellor of AMU is problematic. At present, the Chief Administrative and Academic officer of the University, i.e., the Vice Chancellor is appointed by the Visitor (i.e., the President of India) from among persons recommended by the Executive Council (of AMU) with the proviso that if the Visitor does not approve of any of the persons so recommended, he may call for fresh recommendations from the Executive Council. This system is open to criticism on the grounds that only the nominees of the majority group in the Executive Council stand a chance of nomination. Further, the Executive Council Consists evenly of the internal and external elements and it is unsatisfactory that the Vice-Chancellor should owe his selection mainly to those who will serve under him in the academic and administrative fields. The AMU Enquiry Committee (headed by Professor Chatterji) Report of 1961 have unhesitatingly come to the conclusion that in the circumstances prevailing then (they are no different today) the best solution of the problem lies in the adoption of the method of selecting the Vice-Chancellor as adopted by Delhi University. This method, briefly described, is as follows:

A Committee consisting of three persons, two of whom should be persons not connected with the University, nominated by the Executive Council and one person nominated by the Visitor, submit a panel of not less than three persons to the Visitor. It is provided that if the Visitor does not approve of any of the persons so recommended, he may call for fresh recommendations (Report of AMU Enquiry 1961:132-33).

If this constructive suggestion is accepted by Government of India and it quickly amends the AMU Act in this regard, the next Vice Chancellor can be appointed through this procedure.

Under the prevailing system of election/selection of AMU VC, in operation during the last 100 years, we got very few best persons to serve as VC, especially before independence. Therefore, the government should appoint eminent scholars as Vice Chancellors. The procedure to select VCs should be changed in the light of recommendation of Professor Chatterji Committee Report. At present there is no “search committee” or

advertisement for the post of Vice Chancellor as is found in case of every other Central University. Under the existing system the Vice Chancellor is elected by Court members of AMU. This practice should be discontinued. In fact, the term of VC should be reduced to three years as it prevails in Banaras Hindu University.

Fifth, though the AMU Central library has open access book racks, they are closed at 3.30 p.m. every day and are closed on Sundays and public holidays. More than 100 seminar libraries housed in different Departments are under-utilized and most of them do not have online cataloguing of their collections.

Sixth, there were two serious criticisms about Sir Sayyid's project on modern education. One, his college was meant, initially, to serve elite Muslim class and upper caste men. It admitted and accommodated easily the sons of Nawabs and landlords. However, one must remember that even Cambridge or Oxford universities were elitist during this era. Sir Sayyid's College was a product of its time. It is gratifying to note that later the college did become more open, diverse, and inclusive with changing time. In post-independent India reservations of various categories of students exists, which makes the University a plural community. Second, Sir Sayyid neglected girl's education and his views on it were regressive (Alam 2018: 113; Kidwai 2021: 127-160). Many people advocate that the students and teachers of Women's College should be integrated with the University Faculties and co-education should be introduced at the undergraduate level like Jamia Millia Islamia so that segregation of girl students is brought to an end. Sir Sayyid probably thought that his experiment will fail if he simultaneously provides for girl's education along with boys. It was a tactical move. Later, in 1906 a Girl's School was established by AMU which became Women's College in 1937. In postgraduate courses co-education is introduced. Sir Sayyid's attitude should be seen in the context of Oxford University, which had not introduced co-education till 1978, though it was functioning since 12th century.

Seventh, some scholars like Mohammed Wajihuddin wonder whether AMU has been gradually turning into a modern madrasa since 1980s. Two Vice Chancellors – Mr. Syed Hamid and Mr. Zameeruddin Shah – introduced the policy of admitting students in their graduate courses from Madarsa background. Also, there is a Tablighi footprint on campus, which is enabling some students and teachers to waste their precious academic time in Tablighi activities. These things are affecting the standards and quality of education imparted and leading towards conservative thinking. Moreover, the motto of the university set by its founder, who had said that its students will inculcate the values of rational thinking, free inquiry, large hearted toleration and pure morality, is getting eroded gradually.

Lastly, barring a few faculty members, the majority of AMU faculty are publishing their research papers in predatory and sub-standard journals. These journals publish papers for a fee without providing peer-review or editing services.



## V. Concluding Thoughts: Ways Forward

Notwithstanding the above serious problems, which are common to most Indian Universities today, AMU can revive its golden legacy of excellence by recruiting or rather hunting for talents (following the practices of Sir Sayyid and his grandson Sir Ross Masood) beyond the precincts of AMU. Some Vice Chancellors, like Syed Hamid, in early 1980s brought many reforms like discontinuing appointment of teachers (by local Selection Committee of four members consisting of Dean, Chairman of the Department, a VC nominee and another Professor of the concerned Department) on temporary basis which was going for more than ten or twelve years – subsequently succeeding in getting their jobs regularized. This menace of hiring of temporary or ad hoc teachers has been unfortunately resumed during the last ten years. Moreover, AMU should follow the convention of American Universities, which does not recruit their alumni for a first teaching job, as they are encouraged to join other universities and are welcomed later for higher positions of Associate Professor or Professor. If these suggestions are put into practice, AMU can restart its second journey towards becoming Indian Cambridge or Mecca of higher education.

Sir Sayyid's conception of a university was unprecedentedly remarkable and advanced for his times. In his scheme of things universities should possess five important features. First, the universities should follow the policies of inclusiveness. Its students and faculty should belong to all communities, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. This paper has demonstrated that AMU was not exclusively a Muslim university, though it was created for upliftment of backward Muslim community of the subcontinent; it was truly a national institution. Its donors included Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Shias (like Agha Khan and Nizam of Hyderabad) and ordinary people. Similarly, its doors were open for everyone. Second, the universities should be residential and provide sound moral and religious milieu which helps students to build their character and personality. The multicultural and multireligious milieu of campus will enable students not only learn the culture and religions of fellow students but will also help them in inculcating the ethos of living together with diverse groups. Also, they will become broad minded, tolerant and rational. Third, meritorious and qualified teachers and faculty should be appointed. Fourth, the university should develop secular course curriculum. Finally, no university can come of age and strive to become excellent, unless there are strong mechanisms to resist undue interference of the government in its day today functioning.

AMU's minority character has been denied by the judgments of the constitutional courts (Supreme Court in 1967 Aziz Basha Case, and in January 2006 the Allahabad High Court had struck down the provision of the 1981 amendment Act by which the university was accorded the minority status) and the present Union government headed by Bhartiya Janta Party. A case challenging the constitutionality of government's view and the 2006 Allahabad High Court judgment of not recognising AMU as a minority institution is pending in the Supreme Court for the last 18 years. It is gratifying to note that Supreme Court has referred

the matter in 2019 to a seven-judge constitutional bench. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024, this bench of the Court reserved judgement in the case after eight days of hearings. A seven-judge constitution bench was considering whether AMU qualified as a minority institution under Article 30. Article 30 says that a religious minority is entitled to establish and administer an educational institution of their choice. It is expected that the judgment will be delivered before 10 November 2024, as the Chief Justice Y. V. Chandrachud is demitting office the next day.

Let us sum up. The MAO College and AMU have played a significant role during the last 150 years in awakening and rekindling Indian Muslims from their deep slumber and narrow and orthodox thinking. It uplifted them intellectually and morally to be the partners in nation building. It has taken an important part in shaping the history of the Indian Muslims. It has emerged, since its inception, as a beacon of hope for Muslims, women, other minority groups, and the less privileged. However, the present academic health of the university and the conditions of Indian Muslims is not very sound. In this context we should recall here Zakir Husain's view (an alumnus and former President of India) when he aptly said: "The way Aligarh works, the way Aligarh thinks, the contribution Aligarh makes to Indian life will largely determine the place Musalmans will occupy in the pattern of Indian life" (Hanif vol. 1 2020: 15).

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