



## SIR SAYYID'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND INTER-FAITH TOLERANCE

**Prof. Latif Hussain S. Kazmi,**

Department of Philosophy,

Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

### **ABSTRACT**

In the history of Islamic Renaissance Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) occupied a distinguished position. He emerged as one of the most vibrant personalities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century South-Asian sub-continental Renaissance. He was the founder of Islamic modernism and virtually stands out as the main source of inspiration for the contemporary Muslim Revival Movement. He was a sensitive intellectual, creative thinker, reformer and a dynamic leader. He put up an indomitable struggle against conservatism, irrationalism, superstition and inertia. He fought like a colossus against religious obscurantism and dogmatism and initiated *Ijtihad* and emphasized on '*ilm al-Kalām*'. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan not only firmly believed in the philosophy of tolerance but he also lived and practiced it with utmost dedication and sincerity. In establishing the Muhammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College at Aligarh, he remained well-associated with non-Muslim inhabitants and friends of Indian composite culture. Various Hindus, Christians and other people of different faiths helped and supported Sir Sayyid for this prime and sacred cause of imparting education. 'Education', for him, was the only key to success in all departments of life. His teachings are equally relevant in our times. Religious tolerance, he would advise, is all the more essential and indispensable in contemporary international global society, in general, and in Indian composite society, in particular. Sir Sayyid was well-convinced that without tolerance and peace no human progress would be possible. The present paper shall discuss these features of his thought system.

**Key Words:** Renaissance, Sir Sayyid, Islamic Modernism, Religious Tolerance, Education, Aligarh, MAO College, Philosophy, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sunni, Shi 'ah, '*ilm al-Kalām*'.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan emerged as one of the most dynamic personalities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century South-Asian sub-continental Renaissance. He was the founder of Islamic modernism. He stands out as the main source of inspiration for the contemporary Muslim Renaissance. He was a creative thinker, reformer and a dynamic leader. He put up an indomitable struggle



against conservatism, irrationalism, superstition and inertia. He fought like a colossus against religious obscurantism.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan not only firmly believed in the philosophy of tolerance but he also lived and practiced it with utmost dedication and sincerity. In establishing the Muhammedan Angelo Oriental (MAO) College he remained well-associated with non-Muslim inhabitants and friends of Indian composite culture. Various Hindus, Christians and other people of different faiths helped and supported Sir Sayyid for this prime and sacred cause of imparting education.

The unique feature of the M.A.O. College was that it was a residential school with all its students living on the campus in hostels (dormitories). For Sir Sayyid the aims of his institution included not only academic learning, but also the formation and refinement of the character, inculcation of fellow feeling and tolerance among the students of Aligarh. The college aimed at providing extensive opportunities for faculty-student interaction-dining together, debating and literary societies, and sports-as part of the extra-curricular activities. In view of the same, Aligarh was not merely a college in the ordinary sense of the word, but a movement, a spirit, and the first important step in the Westernization of the Indian Muslim youth that may be able to develop a sense of co-operation, mutual living, understanding and respecting others' faiths. **(Bhatnagar, S.K., 1969, pp.38-44)**

While examining the history of M.A.O. College, one may clearly find the large-hearted, tolerant and fellow-feeling attitude of Sir Sayyid. Highlighting the aim of establishing the College Sir Sayyid asserted: "Though the college was named as the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College and was intended primarily to cater the needs of Muslims, he saw to it that its doors were open to all Indians. He envisaged a community institution and not communal one." **(Nizami, K.A., 1980, p.85)**

It was due to his broadminded openness, tolerant behavior and love of humanity that the other non-Muslim segments of Indian citizens co-operated with him in building up this great institution. Subsequently, Sir Sayyid got moral and financial support from all the sections of the Indian society. Among the first 120 persons who donated generously for the M.A.O. College building were many Hindus like Chaudhari Shir Singh, Raja Dev Narain Singh, Lala Phaul Singh, Kunwar Lekhraj Singh, Raja Shir Narain Singh, Raja Ghanishyam Singh, Raja Udhay Pratap Singh, Lala Vasudeo Sahai, Raja Jai Kishan Das, and the Rajas of Banares, Vizyanagram and Patiala. Out of the *fifty* rooms constructed for the college, *nine* were built by the Hindu donors. One can further realize that when in 1898 Sir Sayyid breathed his last, there were 285 Muslim and 64 Hindu students studying in different classes of the College. Again, many of the Hindu students were also residing in the hostels and all the necessary facilities were provided to them with other Muslim ones. **(Nizami, K.A., 1980, pp.85-86)**



The Hindu people not only shared in the construction of the college building, but also played their active role in Sir Sayyid's educational movement. Out of the seven Indian teaching staff members of the college, at least two were the Hindus: one J.C. Chakravarti, the professor of mathematics, and the other a renowned professor of Sanskrit, Pandit Shiva Shankar. Till date the University has its two hostels – Chakravarti Hostel, in Habib Hall and Raja Jai Kishan Hostel in the Sir SulaImān Hall – after the names of revered Hindu loyal scholars and friends. There were several other Christian friends also who generously contributed to the corporate life of the College. The names of most of all such persons are still engraved on the walls of the University. Highlighting the religio-secular mission of M.A.O. College, Hunter said:

You, gentlemen, who have built this college, will bequeath a far nobler monument to posterity. You will have behind you a magnificent memorial, not of discord, but of the reconciliation of races; a monument of beneficent energy, not of destructive force.... Gentlemen, this college at Aligarh not only provides an education for the Muhammadans of the North-Western Provinces, but it stands forth as an example to all India, of a Muhammedan institution which effectively combines the secular with the religious aspect of education. **(Nizami, K.A., 1980, p.86)**

In real sense, Sir Sayyid wanted this college to act as a bridge between the traditional and the modern, the East and the West and continue to serve the entire Indian nation as well as the whole of humankind at large. On the occasion of laying the foundation stone of the College by the hands of Lord Lytton, Sir Sayyid firmly declared:

That this college may expand into a University whose sons shall go forth throughout the length and breadth of the land to preach the gospel of free inquiry, of large hearted toleration and of pure morality. **(Bhatnagar, S.K, 1969,p.III)**

Sir Sayyid greatness lies in the fact that he honestly tried to open up the Channels of the Communication and Inter-faith Dialogue among the inhabitants on Indian soil: most particularly between Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Muslims, Hindus and Christians and the like.

Sir Sayyid emphasized that religion should enable the followers to come to terms with the changing conditions, to learn from experience and to join the rest of the humanity in its onward march. Further, he believed that it was necessary to interpret religion according to the spirit of times. A religion, in his opinion, which does not move with the times fails to serve the needs of the society and becomes a fossil.



Therefore, according to him it was necessary to develop an *ilm al-Kalām* (Scholasticism) in accordance with the requirements of every age. His religious thought and activity were conditioned by *two* factors; (a) the activities of Christian missionaries in India; and (b) the naturalistic trends of thought in the West. Thus, he appeared as a Muslim Scholastic to meet the *first*, and, a Muslim Rationalist to meet the *second* situation. He was of the view that besides retaining their religious identity Muslims should try to gain modern scientific knowledge in order to adjust themselves in the society of the time. According to Sir Sayyid the revival of the true Islāmic spirit was the first prerequisite for Muslims for regaining their lost position. His personal ideal was non-conformist seminary, one which fostered both knowledge and character.

In the light of the above remarks, Sir Sayyid would advise contemporary Muslim community that instead of being caught in the so-called global civilizational confrontation, it should try to open up channels of communication with all civilizations and champion interfaith dialogue with all the intellectual seriousness and moral commitment at its disposal. Especially, Muslims must go in for dialogue with the leading civilization of the globe i.e., the people belonging to the Euro-American civilization. They must also try to draw their attention towards the fundamental teachings of Islām and make them aware of the crucial problems related to Muslims' freedom, justice and rights.

The prime aim and objective of Sir Sayyid was to propagate the true religious spirit and exercise religious tolerance among the people of different faiths living in India in particular and rest of the world in general.

Sir Sayyid had a broad conception of religion. He said that true religion was 'love for mankind' and service to humanity and that nothing was more lasting and valuable than efforts made for human betterment. He was of the opinion that the Prophets had been sent for this holy purpose, and therefore, this was the best and noblest of all the works that could be done by any individual.

He had a very dynamic, intrinsic and enlightened conception of religion. He interpreted it in terms of human service and identified it with those moral and spiritual values, which gave a forward pull to humanity and ensured its moral well-being. Some fine examples of mutual understanding and cooperation are given hereunder:

On the issue of Hindi-Urdu, Sir Sayyid observed that in his absence (being in England) some Hindu members insisted that the journal must be published in Hindi and books also be translated in



the same language instead of Urdu. As a sensitive socio-political reformer, educationist and lover of humanity, Sir Sayyid inferred that on such critical issue both Hindus and Muslims would never agree. It can lead to disintegration which he inwardly did not like. So he said:

But I think of two aspects of the matter; first, my own temperament is such that I want welfare of all inhabitants of India, whether Hindu or Muslim. Secondly, I am particularly afraid of the fact that the Muslims are all under the shadow of misfortune and adversity. They are involved in false and absurd fanaticism and they do not in the least realize what is harmful to them. Besides, they have greater jealousy, rancour and hollow boastfulness than the Hindus, and are more poverty-stricken also. Due to these reasons they would never be able to do anything for their betterment themselves. (Nizami, K.A., 1980, p.67)

Sir Sayyid Ahmad was anxious to work out the modalities that were essential for the betterment and welfare of all citizens of India and not merely for the Muslims. As a great leader and tolerant lover of humanity, he made effective efforts for all Indian people. Addressing a meeting of the Indian Association of Lahore in 1884, he clearly explained the spirit of real mission of his life:

My friends! You have alluded to the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in your address. I would be sorry if any one were to think that this college was founded to mark a distinction between the Hindus and Mahomedans. The chief cause that led to the foundation of this college was, as I believe you are aware of, that the Mahomedans were becoming more and more degraded and poor every day. Their religious prejudices had kept them back from taking advantage of the education offered by the Government colleges and schools; and consequently it was deemed necessary that some special arrangement should be made for them. It can be thus illustrated: suppose there are two brothers, one of whom is quite vigorous and healthy, while the other is ill and is decaying; then it will be the duty of the former to help him towards his recovery. This was the thought which led me to the foundation of the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College. But I am happy to be able to say that both brothers receive the same instruction in that college. All the rights at the college which belong to one who calls himself a Mahomedan, belong without any restriction to him also who calls himself a Hindu. There is not the least distinction between the Hindus and the Mahomedans. Only he can claim the reward who earns it by his own exertions. Both Hindus and Mahomedans are equally entitled to scholarships at the college; both are treated equally as boarders. I regard Hindus and Mahomedans as my two eyes. (Nizami, K.A., 1980, pp.17-18)



In reality, Sir Sayyid kept all of his socio-political, religio-ethical and academic activities throughout his long life bear out this golden statement based on equality of treatment, love, justice and tolerance. He loved people who respected others' faiths and kept open dialogues for peaceful living.

Sir Sayyid believed that the progress of human society is solely based on peace, justice, mutual love, understanding and faithful caring and active sharing of individuals belonging to all segments and faiths. Thus, for him a sense of tolerance and accommodation need to be inculcated among people of various religions, cultures and civilizations. Hence, he devoted much of finest essays towards elaborating the real humane spirit of cultures, civilizations and religions. On some points regarding the essentials of civilized life he agreed with H.T Buckle on some issues and at the same time he disagreed with him on the role of the Government and religion in the development of better society based on better culture and civilization. Sir Sayyid pointed out that it was his firm conviction that in Asia, particularly in India, one of the chief factors responsible for the degeneration and decay was that people expected everything to be initiated and accomplished by their Governments. Such a total dependence on the Government killed their initiative and spirit of doing anything on their own part and they remained indifferent to their personal even simple problems. In this regard, he remarked, "Unless people begin to think (independently of the state) and decide what they have to do, the Indian Muslims would neither acquire wealth nor prestige, nor honour nor status; neither would there be civilized life nor culture." (Nizami, K.A., 1980, p.94)

Discussing the important function of religion, Sir Sayyid brought out that there were two types of religions—false religion and true or genuine religion. "False religion," he remarked "is doubtless an obstacle to civilized life, but genuine religion can never be an obstacle to human progress." (Nizami, K.A., 1980, p.94) He firmly understood that religion was love for humankind and service of humanity. He stressed that nothing was more lasting and valuable than efforts made for human welfare in all walks of life. All the prophets have been sent for this purpose and therefore, this is the best and the noblest of all works that can be performed by any rational individual.

Sir Sayyid encouraged people to emulate and assimilate what was 'good' in nations which were culturally advanced. However, he also warned them against blind and unhealthy imitation. He said, "Reject their undesirable habits but be quick to adopt and assimilate what is of value in their life and culture." He also brought out that without literacy and culture 'goodness' is not possible. Thus, it is educational enlightenment and culture which vehemently enhance the value of goodness. He also talked about "Brutal Goodness" (*wahshiyana Naiki*) that is the result of illiteracy and uncultured behaviour. He, therefore, advised his people to meet with other educated, cultured and civilized people and learn and spread good manners. He said:



This is why I persuade my people to meet cultured and civilized nations and visit civilized countries. It is a painful thought for me that whatever good qualities our people have are of an uncivilized type: mutual contact in worldly matters, cordiality between friends, religious spirit amongst the religious-minded, affluence among the rich—each of these virtues finds expression in an uncivilized and uncultured manner. If this goodness is embellished with culture, it will be good for the people in this and the next world. **(Khaweshgi, M.A. K.,1952,p. 86, tr. Nizami,p.96)**

Sir Sayyid laid much emphasis on collaboration, on inter-cultural relations and on friendship with other civilized people belonging to different faiths. He found that a human personality that imbibed a profound influence of other civilized cultures could rightfully develop virtues which give cohesion and unity to a society and ensure its growth on appropriate lines. Sir Sayyid writes:

People who think that sincere friendship and cordial affection with people of other religions is forbidden are mistaken. What God has put in human nature is true and absolutely true. We should have true love, friendship and affection for all people to whatever religion they might belong to. **(Nizami, K.A., 1980, pp.97-98)**

For Sir Sayyid religion was a source of self-realization, love, togetherness, self-sacrifice, service to humankind and not for bickering, conflict or coercion. While laying down the qualifications for a teacher of theology at the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College, Sayyid Ahmad stated that he wanted the teacher to inculcate humanism, broadmindedness, tolerance, affection and respect for moral and ethical values amongst the students. **(Bhatnagar. 1969, pp.18-29)** Fatalism and exclusiveness, he used to say, are serious social vices. A closed mind is deprived of all healthy influences and remains in a perpetual state of social backwardness. He further made a strong expression:

In us *Mussalmans* a very serious defect has developed and it is this that sometimes by a mistaken sense of goodness we consider fanaticism as something good and whosever displays great fanaticism in religion and looks down upon followers of other religions and divides their arts and science is considered a praiseworthy person who is firm and orthodox in following his religion. But thinking in this way is a great mistake. In fact such an attitude has ruined the *Mussalmans*. **(Nizami, K.A., 1980, p.98)**

Of course, Sir Sayyid, who was a great admirer of the Prophet of Islām and inspired by his *Sirah*, simply followed what he learnt from the teachings of Prophet Muhammad(S). He was convinced that the protection of life, property and religious freedom of all people having different faiths, is the religious duty of every Muslim as well as the Islāmic state. Sir Sayyid, with reference to the Qur'ānic





verse, "That there is no compulsion in religion," ( *Al-Qur'an*, 2:256) emphasized that Muslims must be just to friends and foes alike in matters related to general human welfare.

Sir Sayyid believed that such an exemplary tolerance is encapsulated in Islāmic teachings. The entire message of Islām is that this life is a test and we have the option of choosing the path to hell or to heaven. The Prophets or Messengers were sent to inform about the choices and to warn about the consequences. They were not sent to forcibly put the people on the right path or to persuade them to adopt any particular faith and neglect the other one. The job of the Muslims is the same. They must deliver the message of Islām to the humanity as they have received it through the Holy Qur'ān and Prophet Muhammad<sup>(S)</sup>. They are neither to change it to make it attractive, nor to coerce others to accept it. In addition, the results in the hereafter will depend upon faith and deed. For all good acts are meaningless in the absence of the proper faith and good intention. And faith is an affair of the heart (*qalb*). It simply cannot be imposed. In this way, for Muslims, religious tolerance is not about political posturing or acquiring power or economic gains but it is a serious religious obligation for them as true believers. They must be a force against all intolerance, even that which is promoted in the guise of tolerance.

Maulana Hali writes that Sayyid Ahmad acquired all the ideals of life from his maternal side through his mother. (**Hali, Altaf Husain, 1990, pp.41-45**) The atmosphere in which he grew up was mainly religious in spirit. His parents were greatly inspired by the mystical tendencies of Islām. In the entire personality of Sayyid Ahmad one clearly finds the intense humanitarian and religious temperament of his mother. It was, in fact, his mother's practical life and constant advice which impressed upon Sayyid Ahmad the value of broadmindedness, tolerance, regard for the elders and sympathy for fellow-beings. (**Dar, B.A., 1957, p.02**)

The chief purpose of the Mohamedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh was to develop overall the personality of a student belonging to any section of the society. However, Sir Sayyid was much concerned about the pitiable condition of the Muslim community because he saw that there was no way for them to progress in various sphere of life except education and proper ethical training. "The M.A.O. College was not intended to be a factory for producing clerks; its objects were much higher and certainly more abiding." (**Bhatnagar, 1969, p. xv**) Again, the College was also not an industry for 'the manufacture of 'Muslim opinion' of any particular brand in India. It only reacted to and was affected by various kinds of politicians of diverse schools of thought' that emerged time and again and faithfully contributed to the socio-political life of the Indian nation. (**Bhatnagar, 1969 p. xv**)

K.C. Bhatnagar has correctly visualized about the M.A.O College stating that its residential life had developed values of life under its own original influences where we find love, care, harmony, compassion, large-heartedness and tolerance. Through his famous *History of M.A.O. College*,





Bhatnagar made an attempt to interpret the mind and spirit of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and to furnish a comprehensive and connected account of the progress of the Institution, development of social and academic life, contributions of various personalities and influences of various political currents, progress of religious toleration, now called the emotional integration, religious instructions and cultural life. (**Bhatnagar, 1969p. xv**)

Moreover, not only in the student community level of the M.A.O. College one finds the students of various faiths and cultures, but in the teaching community too, the College remained fortunate in attracting some noble teachers of various faiths like T.W. Arnold, Maulana Shibli, Maulvi Abdullah Ansari, Maulvi Abbas Husain, Mir Vilayat Husain, Bhawani Chandra Chakarvarti, Asutosh Bhattacharya, T. Morison, C.A. Storey, M.L. Tippling, P.Wallance, Purves, Horovitz, F. Rahman, Pannikar and many more ones. (**Bhatnagar, 1969, p. xiv**) His College's doors were (and are) opened to all alike and he had learnt that students of all faiths would learn the lessons of mutual cooperation, togetherness, love and tolerance from here. Sir Sayyid's such intention was expected to act as the best motivating and cementing factor in the entire development of the Institution. Speaking at Jalandhar on February 4, 1884, he said: "If the two (Hindus and Muslims) sat together on the same benches, lived in the same boarding houses, partook of the ambrosia of knowledge from same hands, the two might acquire feelings of sympathy for each other." (**Bhatnagar, 1969, p. 18**)

Thus, Sir Sayyid not only believed but also practised the ideal of life in serving humanity in the form of unity in diversity – a unique synthesis combining without destroying distinctive features of the communities – that was the solution which Sir Sayyid suggested for the Indian communal problem during his times and which is desperately needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian citizens of all shades and faiths.

Sir Sayyid's vibrant and sensitive mind worked out some essential modalities for the progress and upliftment of the deprived Muslim masses. Thus, he engaged himself in the more fundamental questions of education on priority basis without bothering about the then ultimate objective of political conscious. He believed that participation in politics without education was meaningless and futile and such scenario is till prevailing in our twenty-first century also. He was also not in favour of the elective principle from the very beginning of his political career. He disliked differences on the name of caste, colour, religion or region in socio-political domain. Speaking on Lord Rippon's Local Self Government Bill in 1883, he observed: "So long as differences of race and creed and distinctions of caste form an important element in the socio-political life of India and influence her inhabitants, the system of elections, pure and simple, cannot be safely adopted." (**Bhatnagar, 1969, p. xv**)

It is an important point to note that the Hindus too considered Sir Sayyid as their leader and expressed their gratitude to him when he, as a member of the Viceroy's Council, favoured the enactment of Ilbert Bill as it sought to authorize Indian Magistrates to try criminal cases against



Europeans in India with the same status as the English Magistrates. The Europeans opposed the Bill and Raja Shiv Prasad, another Member, sided with them. It was with reference to these efforts that a deputation of the leaders of Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj of Lahore said in 1886: "On behalf of all the Hindus, we express our gratitude to you for your efforts in the Council in a spirit of patriotism when Hindu Rajas proved disloyal to India." (**Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, pp.406-7**) Similarly, two-year earlier, on January 30, 1884, Munshi Jiwan Dass, leader of the deputation of the Arya Samajists of the same place (Lahore), welcoming Sir Sayyid declared: "We are proud of a man like you who in devoting himself to the welfare of all -- Hindus and Muslims alike." (**Bhatnagar, 1969, p. 26**)

However, Sir Sayyid in return also acknowledged the good will and sincere financial co-operation of Hindus towards Muslims. Addressing the citizens of Muzaffarnagar on February 7, 1884, he said:

I cannot forget the debt of gratitude that I owe to my brother Hindus who, realizing the fallen position of their Muslim brethren have contributed thousands of rupees for the building up of the M.A.O. College. They have really performed a human act of charity. The walls of the College on which their names are inscribed bear testimony to their kindness and non-communal attitude. (**Sir Sayyid, 1886**)

He further continued to acknowledge:

I have recently received some papers from Madras from which I learn that the Hindus of Madras have formed a committee for the advancement of education among Muslims. There, the Hindus are begging for the Muslims and are full of charity for them. (**Bhatnagar, 1969, p.26.**)

Sir Sayyid's spirit of human love and co-existence, tolerance and adjustment and right guidance and steadfastness etc. etc., all were evident throughout his life. He always took care for the emotions and sentiments of others. One fine example, in this regard, we would like to quote is his consideration about 'Cow Sacrifice'. He wrote, "If prohibitions of cow sacrifice can bring peace and friendship among the Hindus and Muslims, it would be wrong on the part of Muslims not to give it up." (**Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, p.785**) Again, once, he came to know that the students of the College had purchased a cow to sacrifice on the precious occasion of the *Eid al-Adha* festival, he was painfully grieved and rushed to the very hostel, took possession of the cow, restored it to the owner and issued strict instructions against sacrificing of cow within the premises of the College. (**Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, pp.785-86**) On the related issue, he published an article in the Institute Gazette of June 12, 1897, appreciating the attitude of the Muslims of Bareilly who voluntarily gave up cow sacrifice on the occasion of *Eid al-Adha* festival in respect and deference to the sentiments of the Hindus. In that article he quoted the example of the town of Manakpur Ganj in district Dacca where the Hindus had



contributed more than the Muslims to build a mosque. Earlier in May, 1897, he referred to the spirit of religious tolerance and wrote: “We should respect the leaders of other religions. It is a matter of great sorrow for me when I read in books and articles on religion that people abuse the leaders of religions other than their own. We must not abuse them whether they are Hindus, Christians, Jews or Parsis.” (Bhatnagar, 1969, pp. 26-7) He also severely admonished the Muslims of Calcutta for constructing of a mosque on an unauthorized piece of land which brought them into conflict with the local Hindus. (Bhatnagar, 1969, p. 27) Sir Sayyid did not like all such actions on the part of his co-religionists which hinder or injure the sentiments of non-Muslim people.

All such instances of sincere co-operation, good will and sympathy were the result of Sir Sayyid’s honest and loyal attitude towards other non-Muslim communities – including Hindus and Christian. His philosophy of tolerance bore fruits in form of a great seat of learning termed as the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, where its alumni learnt (and are learning) the lessons of love, mutual understanding, co-operation, fellow feeling, cordial co-existence, justice, freedom and care to make not merely India strong but world a peaceful living place for humanity.

Thus, it remained Sir Sayyid’s inner yearning to serve humanity in all respects and maintain human dignity irrespective of any consideration. One of important elements of his educational policy was seeking cooperation with all other non-Muslim communities (Bhatnagar, 1969, p. 18) which one clearly finds in the history of M.A.O. College down to the Aligarh Muslim University till date.

In M.A.O. College’s Management Committee, there were several Hindu members and their voice and instructions carried weight in its deliberations. Of the *seven* members present, for instance, in the meeting on March 7, 1878, *three* viz., Lala Lokman Dass, B. Jogendra Nath and Babu Tola Ram were Hindus. Similarly, of the *twenty two* members on the Committee constituted in 1883, *six* were Hindus. (*Institute Gazette*, March, 1883) Similarly, a remarkable and unique instance of emotional integration and togetherness could be visualized when at a meeting organized by Sir Sayyid on August 1, 1882, to form a committee of members of the neighbouring districts for the consideration of the “condition of education of Muslims and to place their proposals before the Education Commission at Aligarh,” out of 71 members presented 9 were from Hindu community. (Bhatnagar, K.C., 1969, p.27)

Further, Sir Sayyid insisted that there might be differences in the political outlook but these ones were not incompatible with patriotism and that brotherly relations with Hindus had nothing to do with political views. In this connection he said at Amritsar in 1884, “I tell both Muslims and Hindus that no doubt it is impossible to have a unanimous opinion on all the points but it would not be strange if both joined hands in problems common to both, for the good of all. If you will not do, then both, Hindus and Muslims, will equally suffer. I have often said that it is impossible for either a Hindu or a Muslim to rule over India.” (Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., pp.24-25) Maintaining a sense of mutual



brotherhood and tolerance, he, just a year before his death, said, “It is not in the interest of Muslims to join the Congress agitation, but still they can behave well towards each other and live peacefully in spite of their differences in politics.” (*Institute Gazette*, June 12, 1897) His remarkable address, on January 27, 1873, about Hindu-Muslim unity could rightfully throw light and provide guidance for our current 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian socio-political and religio-ethical scenario:

To be a Hindu or a Muslim is a matter of inner faith and belief. It has nothing to do with the worldly matters and mutual social intercourse. India belongs to both of us (Hindus and Muslims). Both of us breathe the air of India and in equal measure drink the waters of the Ganges and the Jamuna. The Muslims adopted many Hindu customs and Hindu adopted many Muslims habits. We share the happiness and sorrows of birth and death in an equal degree. We have evolved common language — Urdu. We, by virtue of living in the same country, are one nation. (**Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, p.787**)

Sir Sayyid not only made his efforts for working out unity in diversity and initiating inter-faith dialogues, he also worked for integrating people at intra-faith level with a view to fostering tolerance and mutual cordial living among Muslims themselves. As a sensitive, constructive socio-religious reformer he made every possible effort to serve humanity. Sir Sayyid was well convinced that without unity in among various faiths, social, political and mutual understanding even at intra-faith level was not possible. Therefore, all sections of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and people belonging to other segments must try to work out the modalities to unite people within and outside their faiths. Sir Sayyid did not approve of any kind of hatred leading to disintegration and division of humankind or hindering their progress. His stress on reconciliation of religion with Western thought brought out the avenues of progress and adjustment with the passage of time. With reference to Sir Sayyid's educational policy at M.A.O. College, theological teachings and Hindu-Muslim cordial relationship and co-existence, K.C. Bhatnagar writes:

The Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College was a new venture, combining religion with the apparently irreconcilable western thought. The need to re-interpret Islāmic teaching in the light of Western education and scientific development was apparent. The management of Theological teachings was entrusted to a Committee consisting of the *Sunni* and the *Shia Ulema* in order to infuse confidence among Muslims. The residential system was introduced to maintain the homogeneity of the Islāmic brotherhood and to create a sense of one-ness among Hindus and the Muslims. (**Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., p.18**)

Sir Sayyid Ahmad initiated an entirely different spirit of religion in the M.A.O. College. He also learnt that Western education tended to make people indifferent to religion. Therefore, in order to



check and guard against any such risks, the College had combined religious education with secular instruction. Hence, it was mandatory for all the Muslim students of the College to say their prayers at appointed times. Both *Sunni* and the *Shi'ah* students studied their respective theologies in separate classes. The College started with a special department for the study, exclusively of Persian and Arabic, so that the students might become well-versed in Islāmic history and culture – that is why the word “Oriental” was associated with the name of the College. (Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., p.29)

His vision of the College was anchored on liberal values. So, proper emphasis was laid in the scheme on moral and religious aspects of education in contrast to the prevalent secular and utilitarian education. “The education of the College should be able to change the vision and thought of the students towards cultural and religious advancement of the community.” (Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., p.40)

Sir Sayyid faced various forms of criticism from some sections of Muslims on Sunni- Shia theological issues. ‘some people feared that only Shi’ah literature would be taught while other religious minded persons were opposed to giving a cash contribution as its investment would yield interest, which they regard sacrilegious.’ (Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, p.560) Again, some *Ulema* of the time like ‘Maulvi Muhammad Qasim and Maulvi Muhammad Yaqub objected to Sunnis being taught along with Shi’ahs.’ (*Institute Gazette*, February 19, 1875) Sir Sayyid boldly ‘advised the two divines to quit India and migrate to Mecca to escape contact with Shi’ahs who were to be found all over India, but to their chagrin in Mecca too they would come across Shi’ahs as they too performed *Hajj* and the *Tawaf* (Circumambulation round the Ka’bah).’ (Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, p.560) Resultantly, the critics brought *Fatwas* (religious decrees) against Sir Sayyid for all such activities and other ones indicating that he was persuading people to learn English and imitate the manners and behaviour of Englishmen; did not believe in various teachings of Islām, like the physical ascension of the Prophet to heaven etc. etc. Thus, Maulvi Imdad Ali collected *Fatwas* from different parts of India and Maulvi Ali Bakhsh Khan went to Mecca and Medina in 1873 to bring the religious decrees (*Fatwas*) against him and his proposed M.A.O. College. (Hali, Altaf Hussain, 1990, pp.548-54)

Sir Sayyid always worked for Sunni-Shi’ah unity and their cordial understanding in all religious matters because he believed that without their mutual cooperation no struggle for the all-round progress of the Muslim community would be possible. That is why in the prospectus of his vision of the College he clearly instructed to the Muslim students, “It will be strictly enforced that Shi’ah and Sunni boys shall not discuss their religious differences in the College in the boarding house.” (Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., p.39) The teachers and students did follow these instructions of the founder and worked jointly for the welfare of the college. An example Sunni- Shi’ah unity might be cited here. Maulvi Abdullah Ansari, who was appointed in 1893 and made responsible for the arrangements of the Mosque, used to explain ‘the verses from the Qur’ān to a combined audience of Shi’ahs and Sunnis in the Strachey Hall.’ (Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., pp.102-3) Further, there were also



two management committees for the Sunni and the Shi'ah theological teachings and the maintenance of proper religious atmosphere in the M.A.O. College. Of both the communities: Muhammad Inayatullah Khan was the president of the Sunni Theological Committee whereas Maulvi Syed Ali Muhammad directed the teaching of Shi'ah Theology as President of the Shi'ah Committee. **(Bhatnagar, 1969, K.C., p.65)** In this way, Sir Sayyid made every possible effort towards creating an atmosphere of intra-faith dialogue ensuring unity, tolerance and fellow feeling among his co-religionists. He also warned the Muslims belonging to all sects – Sunni, Shi'ah and within them other ones – to keep all the minor differences away and jointly work for the overall welfare of the backward Muslim community. He said that the Muslims were already in minority in India, they had no money, no employment in governmental offices and if they fight with themselves on petty religious issues and declared the other sect as *Kafir* (unbeliever) and disunited themselves it would bring ruination of Muslim community. They could do everything if they were united and jointly worked for education and other welfare programmes. **(Hali, Altaf Hussain 1990, p.561)**

Side by side he also worked for the unity of humankind in general. On national level, he said that there are two kinds of people: one section of people is your brother in religion and the other one belongs to your nation. So far as the matter of faith is concerned, leave this issue to God. So far as your common citizenship with Hindus is concerned, be equal shareholders with them and do justice with such people, share your joy and sorrow with them and jointly work for the common minimum welfare-agenda to make the whole country strong and prosperous. **(Maqalat-i Sir Sayyid, pp.138-39)**

In fact, co-existence and mutual understanding at inter-faith level among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis etc. and at intra-faith level among the Muslim sects like Sunnis, Shi'ahs, Wahhabis etc. in the entire history of this great Institution – from the *Madrasah* to M. A. O. College and to the Aligarh Muslim University – continued to operate effectively throughout his life and his deep faith in secularism and pluralism was never dimmed or weakened. Sir Sayyid thought that if we were respecting pluralistic and secularistic spirit of India we could unitedly do any positive action that humanity required. Therefore, we all must inculcate a deep sense of mutual love and true friendship as initiated and practised by the founder of our *alma matter*.

Sir Sayyid's suggestion to contemporary Muslims of the world would be that apart from exercising highest diplomatic sophistication in international relations, in personal and religious practices strike personal relations with Hindus, Christians and modernist Euro-Americans and other Indians of different faiths and cultivate as much sweetness, good-will and affection with all of them as possible. Religious tolerance, he would advise, is all the more essential and indispensable in contemporary international global society, in general, and in Indian composite society, in particular. Sir Sayyid was well-convinced that without tolerance and peace no human progress would be possible.





### References:

1. Bhatnagar, S.K., (1969), *History of the M.A.O. College Aligarh*, Sir Sayyid Hall, (Bombay I: Asia Publishing House,
2. Nizami, K.A., (1980), *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, (Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
3. Hunter, W.W., (1872) *Indian Musalmans*, London.
4. *Maqalat-i Sir Sayyid* (Urdu) (1952), ed. Khaweshgi, M.A. K., Aligarh: National Printers Co..
5. *Al-Qur'an*, 2:256.
6. Hali, Altaf Husain, (1990) *Hayat-i-Jawed*. New Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Bureau, (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition).
7. Dar, B.A.,(1957),*Religious Thought of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan*, Lahore Institute of Islāmic Culture.
8. Sir Sayyid, *Lectures* (see also his address on Dec.27, 1886).
9. *Maqalat-i Sir Sayyid* (Urdu), (edt.) Khaweshgi.