Chapter III

Syed Ahmad Khan and the Shifting Notion of 'Self'

> In Sir Syed Ahmad I saw the grandeur, the lion like strength, the high ideals, the passionate enthusiasm, of a great mind. No Musalman, whom I ever met, impressed me more by the force and dignity of his character and his commanding intellectual greatness than Sir Syed Ahmad. Where he went, he naturally took the lead. His personality demanded it, and men instinctively followed him. His very presence and appearance were commanding. His was a born leader of men. (C. F. Andrews)[1]

3.1 Introduction

Syed Ahmad Khan[2] or more popularly Sir Syed holds an important and yet controversial place in the history of India and the Indian subcontinent. Syed Ahmad is today most widely known as the founder of Aligarh Muslim University in the town of Aligarh in the western Uttar Pradesh of today's India. The University was founded by Syed Ahmad in 1875 in the form of a school under the auspice of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College. The College began functioning in 1877 and it achieved the status of a university in 1920. The establishment of the College in 1875 was deeply implicated in the political, social, religious and cultural history of India and it is for this reason that Syed Ahmad becomes such an important figure in the nineteenth and twentieth century Indian history.

Rajmohan Gandhi begins his portrait of Syed Ahmad Khan as someone who is "hailed, and assailed, as the founder of Muslim separatism on the subcontinent" and also

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[1] C. F. Andrews. *Zaka Ullah of Delhi*. 1929. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003.

[2] Various scholars have used different spellings while referring to Syed Ahmad. Some of the usual spellings are Syed Ahmad, Syed Ahmed, Sayyid Ahmad and Sayyid Ahmed. In this thesis, I have followed the spelling Syed Ahmad which has been used by Shan Muhammad, former chairperson of Sir Syed Academy at Aligarh Muslim University and one of the most prolific writers on Syed Ahmad Khan. Variations in spelling have been retained in quotations of other writers. Again, instead of using the surname Khan, as is the practice in academic writings, I have kept Syed Ahmad as he was/is referred to as either Sir Syed or Syed Ahmad.

someone who is "blamed, and praised, as a modernizer of Islam" (R. Gandhi 1987:19). Indeed, Syed Ahmad was more than a founder of a College. He intervened in the social history of his time, especially that of Muslim community, in the second half of the nineteenth century and left it changed forever. He emerged as a leader of the Muslim community, or more specifically, the Muslim elite at a time when 'Muslim' as a category was under the onslaught of the British colonial rule and the dignity of community had reached its nadir. It is to Syed Ahmad's credit that he fashioned a new identity for his community vis-à-vis the British colonial rule. This chapter will look at how Syed Ahmad went about fashioning a new 'self' for himself and how in the process he also fashioned a 'national subject' which stood against the normative 'national subject' put together by the Hindu elites such as Bankim and others in the late nineteenth century.

Syed Ahmad was born in 1817 and died in 1898. His childhood and youth was spent in a time of great upheaval and his middle age saw the most momentous event of the nineteenth century India, the 1857 revolt. In order to understand Syed Ahmad and his development as a person and an ideologue, it is important to locate him in the social history of his time.

3.2 Social History of the Nineteenth Century Mughal India

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the political control of Mughal India came to be confined to the limits of Red Fort and it ended precisely and conclusively in 1857 with the arrest of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and his exile to Burma on the charges of instigation of mutiny against the British East India Company. But its political place in the nineteenth century is less important for its wielding of political power and more important for its social contours and the far-reaching changes influences it had mostly in North India, from the erstwhile North-West Frontier Provinces (current Pakistan) to Bengal (current Bangladesh). This influence needs to be read against

the upheaval generated by the disintegration of the Mughal rule and the consolidation of the British rule over India. This shift in the administration brought about changes in the social structure as well as between the society and the administration. To understand this changing relationship, it is important to map the social life under the Mughal rule.

To say that the Mughal rule was the Muslim rule over India will be to fall into the trap of British colonial historiography. The Mughal rule right from the times of Akbar had an eclectic mix of Hindu and Muslim office holders. This gives it a different flavour from the idea of Islamic rule where Muslims were supposed to rule over the non-believers (non-Muslims). The Mughal rulers, generally, kept *Ulama*[3] (Muslim priestly class) at a distance from the political affairs and developed a system where they brought in non-Muslim rulers and officials under their dispensation by giving them important positions and portfolios in the Mughal administration. For their part, such non-Hindu officials accepted the rule of the Mughal Empire and worked for the emperor. Even at the time of Aurangzeb, supposedly the most devout of Muslim rulers, only the topmost positions were all occupied by the Muslims. A major part of the subordinate positions were filled with Hindus. This certainly works against the view that the Mughal rule was the Muslim rule over India.[4]

The Mughal rule gave rise to a complex social relationship among the elites, both Hindus and Muslims, of the country. These relationships defied any simple homogenization whether vertical or horizontal. A major social organization was based on kinship pattern where people were related horizontally to each other through the ties of marriage and kinship and such groups were related to the Mughal rule vertically. But this was not the only pattern of social organization. David Lelyveld writes:

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[3] *Ulama* as a class is one which possesses the quality of *ilm*, that is knowledge or learning, science in the widest sense.

[4] For a discussion on the pattern of employment under the Mughal rule, see Lelyveld 1978.

> The major social categories among north Indian Hindus were the *biradari*, an exogamous patrilineage, and the *jati*, an outer network of potential marriages. Jati was a loose category that often substituted subdivisions of unequal status, and served in the society at large as a vehicle for the attribution of moral qualities and therefore status. Among Muslims the principles of exogamy and endogamy were weaker. There was often a strong preference for marrying *within* the close patrilineal unit, also called biradari, but there was no outer boundary beyond which a Muslim male could not make a legitimate marriage. (22; emphasis in the original)

Both these groups were associated with the Mughal rule in diverse ways through kinship structure as well as through "ritual ties of loyalty" (23). There was a set pattern on manning different departments of the rule. No department consisted wholly of Muslim staff or Hindu staff. The proportion of the staff of both these communities was carefully planned out. Care was taken to ensure that members of the staff in the same locality are not bound to each other through any kinship ties so that the only common bond between them remains that of loyalty to the Emperor (23).

This means that a person could have got into the service of the Mughal Empire through diverse ways. One was if his father or close relative is already in the service. The other was to be a local feudal lord or subordinate to the local zamindars[5] (landlords). Another way was to have extraordinary administrative, military or educational abilities. Many people who came from Arabian countries were absorbed into the Mughal bureaucracy on the basis of their special ability.

As far as the Hindu social relationships go they were divided into numerous castes and communities. The boundaries separating these castes and communities were not homogeneous in all cases. The upper castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas) worked together whenever their interests demanded so. Religion never prevented them from

[5] Robinson (1974: 439) describes zamindars as the one who held the right of property in land and paid rent to the government either individually or jointly under the colonial government. Zamindars, in turn, had the right to collect rent and to regulate the occupancy of all other tenures on his estate.

working with the Mughal Empire and they developed close affinity with the Muslim elite who were their colleagues in bureaucracy and judiciary.[6]

The close contact between Hindus and Muslims created problems for British officials too as their enterprise of identification and classification of Indian population[7] consistently met with these sorts of overlapping social and religious customs of Hindus and Muslims. Lelyveld refers to Henry M. Elliot who in 1848 complained of problems in classifying some groups even in broad categories such as Hindu or Muslim. For him, a Bhisti (a lower caste person who was engaged in carrying water for elite classes) looked more Muslim than Hindu but he considered himself as a Hindu whereas Badgujars were also included Muslims but retained their Rajput titles (13). Later edition of Elliot's text (1869) was expanded by John Beames and it divided Muslims as:

> Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals, Pathans, and a variety of artisan and service castes such as Jullahas [weavers], Nais [barbers], Bihistis [water-carriers], and Dhobis [washer men]. Each of the artisan and service groups had Hindu counterparts—or Hindu members. (Lelyveld 13)

Further overlap which problematized the neat distinctions of categories was recounted by Denzil Ibbetson, Director of Punjab Census in 1882 who pointed out that in Western Punjab, Hindus had a relaxed attitude to endogamy and that in Eastern Punjab it was hard to differentiate a Muslim Rajput, Gujar or Jat from his Hindu counterpart. He further illustrated that many Muslims retained Brahmin priests and there were cases of Muslim Brahmins (Lelyveld 15). Francis Robinson in his book, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923*, expresses the same opinion. Robinson writes that in the British official records, "the Muslims have been treated as a monolithic bloc. This has been a matter of convenience. It was not a matter of fact" (23-24). Robinson delineates the macro as well as micro divisions among the

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[6] For discussion on Hindu and Muslim participation in the Mughal bureaucracy, see Robinson 1974: 29-32.
[7] Gyanendra Pandey (2006) calls this tendency as "The colonial obsession with ethnic and doctrinal signs for the identification of rival crowds…"

Muslim society. On the macro level, there were two divisions: *ashraf*[8] and those of indigenous origin. *Ashrafs* were those who considered themselves to be the descendants of original immigrants to India such as Syeds, Sheikhs, Mughals and Pathans. The macro group was of those Muslims who were the inhabitants of India and converted to Islam. This was further subdivided into different categories: first, those who were converted from high castes such as Rajputs; second, those who were converted from clean occupations such as Julahas; and third, those who were converted from unclean occupations such as Chamars. There were further divisions in the Muslim community based on theological doctrines, Shias and Sunnis. These were further subdivided into different school of thoughts. Further cleavages in the community can be seen in conflicting interests in government services, land and religion. Most of *ashraf*s came from their homelands in Middle East Asia to India in search of services in Mughal bureaucracy or military. This trend continued even in the nineteenth century. The government service was a major source of livelihood for most of these elites (Robinson 24-25).

Lelyveld locates these attempts of classifying the Indian society by the British in the broader theory of history that saw the "Indian society as a museum of evolutionary layers each composed of separate, birth-defined social groups that were unable to relate to each other as constituents of a larger whole" (16). It is easy to see that the labels used by British officials in their census and other records were contradictory to the prevailing social structure of the country and their efforts were arrived at best by freezing diverse and seemingly contradictory labels of identity which were used by Indians to identify themselves. For instance, the 1872 census uses four categories to classify the Indian society: Aborigines, Aryans, Mixed, and Muslims. These four broad categories were reduced to three in 1881 census where Aborigines and Mixed were merged to form a

[8] *Ashraf* is the Urdu word for 'gentleman'. It is used to refer to Muslim person of rank or a Muslim gentleman.

single category. Again, caste was taken to be the feature of only Hindu religion as later surveys used a label of "Caste if Hindu, otherwise religion" (15). This relating of caste only with Hindu went against the field experiences and works of Britishers such as Henry M. Elliot (1848) and John Beames (1869) who found the practice of caste among Muslims too.

3.3 Mughal Society v/s the East India Company: Rise of a New Social Landscape

The consolidation of the East India Company rule over India by the beginning of the nineteenth century more or less brought far reaching changes in the social structure of the Mughal society, that is, groups which were intricately linked to the Mughal rule by the virtue of their employment in any category. Again these groups were not homogeneous in anyway, except in their connection with the Mughal Empire. The landed gentry amassed huge lands and estates for themselves from the Mughal Empire. The other group was that which formed the cog in the wheel of Mughal bureaucracy, military and judiciary. With the gradual decline in the Mughal power, the traditional avenues of employment started shrinking rapidly for the social elite. The landed gentry did not face any immediate financial problems with this rapid decline in the Mughal rule but the other group, of bureaucrats and petty officials, was forced to look for other options for survival. In the nineteenth century, East India Company increasingly became an important source of employment for these people and most of these people took up jobs in different departments of the East India Company ranging from revenue to judiciary to military.[9] This transition from employment in the Mughal Empire to that of the East India Company and later on the British colonial government was easier for Hindus but not so for the Muslim elites. There were two divisions among them: those who considered the British as usurpers of power from the Muslims of India and who resented any contact with them.

[9] For a brief account of such instances see Gulfishan Khan 1998: 25-28.

The other group was of those who believed very strongly that the East India Company was in India for good and the Mughal rule had gone forever. This second group took up employment with the East India Company in various capacities. There were those elites whose capabilities were well-known and well-respected by both the Mughals as well as the East India Company officials. Distinguished persons such as Mahomed Reza Khan, Ali Ibrahim Khan, Khairuddin Khan Illahabadi, Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad Khan, Tafazzul Hussain, Munshi Izatullah, etc. worked for both the powers and for some other local rulers too.[10] In fact, not only such people benefitted by their association with the British, the British too gained much through their services. The importance of such people for the British rule has been underlined by C. A. Bayly:

> ….until as late as the 1830s the Company's state could not have functioned without highly placed Indian functionaries as munshis and ambassadors. In turn, their 'native servants' helped to perpetuate the archaic, status-conscious character of early British rule. (2007: 78)

Gulfishan Khan traces this tendency of moving from one power to another power in the eighteenth century itself. In her book, *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West During the Eighteenth Century*, she locates this shift in the declining power of the Mughals:

> As a result of succession of weak rulers at the centre of Mughal empire resulted in diminishing remittance of revenue from different parts of the Empire. This led to difficulty in maintaining the military and bureaucratic machinery and result in job loss for many small mansabdars, soldiers, subordinate officers of revenue and military department. (23)

Many people in the service gentry, who were formerly with the Mughal Empire, gained entry into the East India Company services.[11] A few of them succeeded in gaining higher positions and enjoyed the confidence of higher authorities by a combination of administrative skills and literary acumen (25). Syed Ahmad's maternal grandfather Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad was one such person who served both the powers in

[10] For detailed information on these and other such people, see C. A. Bayly 2007: 78-86.
[11] C. A. Bayly writes that "By the early nineteenth century British service seemed the only guarantee of a gentleman's competency" (2007: 84).

multiple capacities. In his active public life, he worked as the superintendent of Calcutta madarasa established by the East India Company, served as an envoy of the East India Company, became a tehsildar, then joined the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar Shah II as a minister, was forced to leave the job and go to Calcutta once again, and finally he was recalled to the court of Akbar Shah II (R. Gandhi 1987: 20). But perhaps, Khwaja Farid ud Din was last of the generation which moved effortlessly from one ruling power to another. After that the choice was sharply divided: either to be in the employ of the East India Company or to work with the rapidly declining Mughal Empire or local rulers.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the East India Company had become a major employer in India. They became the government of the country and their employees became the 'government' employees, especially after 1857 when the British rule remained the only rule in most parts of India. The British rule brought in its own bureaucracy which was a mixture of the British and the Mughal. To be in the government service by the middle of the nineteenth century was to wield enormous power. Robinson notes the growing importance of this class of government servants throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. He writes:

> The most powerful group in nineteenth-century India were (sic) the government servants. Of the 54.000 who helped to govern the province [United Province] in 1880, a mere 200 belonged to the ruling race; the great body of administration was transacted, as in other provinces, by Indians. The powers of government servants were great. They estimated the peasant's land revenue, they assessed the trader's income tax. They decided who was right in squabbles over irrigation and religious customs. They even chose who should succeed them in these functions. These may not seem odd powers for government servants to wield, but in a society in which family and clan loyalties were strong, in which communal antagonism was endemic, in which, in fact, impartiality was practically impossible and thought to be so, they were less the reasonable powers of government than a licence to confer favour, to withhold rights and harass. (20-21)

This clearly indicates that the old ways of bureaucratic functioning was still prevalent. The new administration did not completely wipe out the old way of entering into the services. Newer ways of recruitment based on competition existed alongside the kinship and apprentice pattern of recruitment. In fact, the recruitment based on competitive examination was resisted by many departments of the Company (45). It was in this complex social pattern of early nineteenth century colonial India that Syed Ahmad must be placed.

3.4 Syed Ahmad Khan: Rise of a New Social Elite

Syed Ahmad Khan was born in 1817 amidst the most confusing times for the Muslim elite in the Mughal North India. He was raised in a comfortable household of his maternal grandfather Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad. Syed Ahmad traced his lineage right the Prophet Mohammad himself (Hali 1). His ancestors migrated to India during the reign of Shahjahan and they got into imperial service. This association continued till the death of Mir Muttaqi, Syed Ahmad's father. Syed Ahmad, on his part, refused to join the Mughal services and chose instead the East India Company as an employer.

Syed Ahmad's father, Mir Muttaqi, was a carefree person who was inclined towards mysticism and some of his free-spiritedness also went into the personality of Syed Ahmad (Hali 3). But the decisive influence on him in his childhood was his mother Aziz un Nisa and his maternal grandfather Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad. Hali draws an elaborate account of Aziz un Nisa showing how her straightforward religiosity, shorn of superstition rubbed off on Syed Ahmad. It was his mother who taught him the etiquette of the *sharif*[12] culture in many ways (9). Khwaja Farid ud Din was an exceptional diplomat

[12] *Sharif*, in Islam, is used for those Muslims who ancestors came to India from Arabia, that is, they were not converted into Islam from any Indian religion. The term is used to describe the hierarchy among Muslims in India. Those belonging to *sharif* culture consider themselves superior to those who converted to Islam from other religions in India. The primary education of children in such a culture was to learn what it

who served as an envoy of East India Company to Iran as well as to Burma. Later on, he joined the Mughal Court as its Prime Minister where he tried to curtail the increasing expenditure in the running of the Mughal palace by strict regulations and account keeping. By his astute account management, he was able to pay off the huge debt incurred by the Emperor but had to resign from his post because his austerity measures were unpopular with the inhabitants of the Mughal palace. In his personal life, like a patriarch of a *sharif* household, he maintained a large household with many relations living in the house along with a retinue of servants. He took an active interest in the learning of the children in his household. However, Syed Ahmad showed qualities of both his mother as well as Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad in his later life (Muhammad 1969: 44-45). Like his mother, Syed Ahmad was deeply religious but abhorred superstition. Probably it was his mother from whom he learned the lesson of taking care of the people of his community. In his later dealings with the East India Company officials on the one hand and the elites of his own community on the other, he showed immense skill of negotiation and diplomacy which was the characteristic of Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad.[13]

Lelyveld points to the fact that it was a bit unusual for a child not to live in his father's house. But there is no evidence either in Syed Ahmad's writings or from any other source to gauge what he felt about this arrangement. Lelyveld opines that this "absence of a household in the paternal line may have represented some kind of deprivation, a sense that one's father's line lacked authority and security" (40-41). He speculates that this may have some connection to the fact that Syed Ahmad chose his career outside Delhi and kept his family with him wherever he was transferred (41). But it

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was meant to be a member of such a culture. A complex grid of etiquettes marked *sharif* culture. For an elaborate discussion of *sharif* culture, see Hasan 2009a: 2-8.

[13] Ramachandra Guha (2010: 3) notes that the family "was not orthodox—they patronized musicians and mystics and may also have allowed the consumption of wine." No other biographer of Syed Ahmad talks of wine consumption in Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad's household. It is not clear where Guha draws his inferences from.

can be argued that this is a psychoanalytic misreading or over-reading on part of Lelyveld. Syed Ahmad's movement from one place to another in United Provinces was not in his hand and being in the service of the East India Company, he went wherever his job and promotions took him. Lelyveld's reading also does not take into account the fact that in 1846, Syed Ahmad applied for a permanent transfer to Delhi to take care of his mother. Although the request for a permanent transfer was not granted but he remained stationed in Delhi for eight years from 1846 to 1854. The point I wish to make is that it was not so unusual for a child in the nineteenth century to spend his childhood in the house of maternal grandparents for the sake of education.[14]

Syed Ahmad's growth in the large household of Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad followed the pattern of life of children of the *sharif* families. In the complex set of relationships in such families, a child needed to learn how to negotiate each relation based on proximity, age, status and modes of etiquette. Syed Ahmad too went through these lessons. In that intricate web of social relations, he learned different things from different people such as his father, uncle, mother, grandfather and others. What is of note is that his early lesson in *Quran* was under a female teacher hired by the family. Syed Ahmad also learned the intricacies of the courtly behaviour as he had to visit the Mughal court on different occasions for his father was on friendly terms with the Mughal emperor. Hali notes that during these visits to the Mughal court Syed Ahmed saw Raja Rammohan Roy (Hali 23). Ramachandra Guha picks up this reference in Hali to provide an interesting parallel in the lives of Raja Rammohan Roy and Syed Ahmed (2010: 55). He points to apparent similarities in the life and work of both Roy and Syed Ahmed such as both acquired knowledge through keeping company with the British and both wrote

[14] I have personally observed that many young boys even in today's Uttar Pradesh and Bihar stay with their maternal grandparents if they are assured of a better education facility in that place.

prolifically in more than one language (2010: 56).[15] As an account of striking similarity in their outlook, Guha quotes Hali's account of Syed Ahmad's attitude towards British after 1857. Hali writes that Syed Ahmad "realized that the future well-being of his fellow Muslims depended on two major factors—Western education and an ability to understand and mix freely with the British; otherwise it seemed to him that the Muslims stood little chance of making progress or of retaining a place of honour and respect in India" (quoted in Ramachandra Guha 2010: 57). Guha compares this with what Ram Mohan Roy wrote in December 1829:

> From personal experience, I am impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen; the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs; a fact which can be easily proved by comparing the condition of those of my countrymen who have enjoyed this advantage with that of those who unfortunately have not had that opportunity" (2010: 57).

Indeed a striking commonality in the outlook towards the British rule is clearly visible in Ramachandra Guha's analysis.

Syed Ahmad entered the services of the East India Company in 1838 after the death of his father. Like many others of his social milieu, he had the choice of joining the Mughal court. Syed Ahmad declined the offer much against the wishes of his family. He understood it clearly that the days of the Mughal rule were over and it is the East India Company which is going to rule over the country for the long time to come. Shan Muhammad writes that Syed Ahmad knew "the financial instability of the Mughal kings who were themselves petitioning the Crown for more monetary benefits" (2008: 3). Such an understanding was enough for him to decide where his future was. But he was shrewd enough not to sever social connections with the Mughal rule. Even while in the service of the East India Company, he was given the hereditary title of Jawad-ud-Dowla Arif-e-Jang

[15] Guha is bit overstating the knowledge of English in Syed Ahmad's case. Syed Ahmad always required an assistant to help him with English reading, writing and comprehension.

by the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar which he accepted. This was a balancing act on his part as he tried to negotiate his way in life. He already had opposed his family in his choice of his career so he avoided further clashes and maintained a semblance of relationship with the old order.

Like any other young man seeking an entry into employment, Syed Ahmad apprenticed himself to his uncle Maulvi Khalilullah Khan who was a *Sadr Amin* (Subordinate Magistrate) in Delhi. By hard labour he started getting noticed by the British judicial officials. He went to Agra to become a Deputy Munshi[16] in 1838. In 1841, he was appointed to the post of Munsif[17] in Mainpuri and he continued to hold the same position when he was transferred to Fatehpur Sikri in 1842. He became Sadr Amin (Subordinate Magistrate) at Bijnaur in 1854. He was in Bijnaur when the 1857 mutiny took place. He was transferred to Moradabad in 1858 as Sadr us Sudur. He was transferred to Ghazipur in 1862 and to Aligarh in 1864. He was promoted as a Judge of Small Cause Court in 1867 and was transferred to Benaras. Finally, he retired from the government service in 1876. After working in a host of districts in the United Provinces and in Delhi, Syed Ahmad retired to the town of Aligarh where his Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College was taking shape. He spent the rest of his life in developing and taking care of this institution.

Syed Ahmad's judicial career spanned roughly four decades. The beginning and development of his career in the East India Company and later on in the British colonial services demonstrated his creed of compromise with the ruling power of the day and what benefits could this compromise yield to a person. When the Muslim community as a group faced the severest hostility of the government, Syed Ahmad was feted by the same government for his loyalty, hard work, honesty and forthrightness. It was a position which

[16] Munshi is used for the person who acts as a secretary, clerk, reader, writer, interpreter etc. (Hasan and Zaidi 2011: 240).
[17] Munsif was the lowest grade of judge under British government in India. (Robinson 437)

attracted appreciation and ridicule from the Muslim community in equal measures. The position which Syed Ahmad fashioned or carved out for himself requires a careful reading.

3.5 1857 Revolt and Delegitimization of the 'Muslim'

In order to understand the self-fashioning of Syed Ahmad, it is important to focus on the 1857 Revolt which is variously described as the 1857 Mutiny or Sepoy Mutiny or First War of Independence. The 1857 Revolt brought the category of 'Muslim' into play for the first time in colonial India. The British colonial administration branded 'Muslims' as the instigators of the events of 1857 and it was Muslims who faced the biggest persecution in the aftermath of the 1857 Revolt. It was widely believed in the official circles of the East India Company that Muslims were chiefly responsible for the revolt against the British. It was only by displacing the Muslim rule in India that the East India Company was able to establish its rule so, the belief was, Muslims naturally had the reason to revolt against the East India Company and re-establish the Muslim rule once again. C. A. Bayly points out the official accounts of the revolts in which extremist or puritan Muslim sects such as the Wahabis were held responsible for carrying out revolt against the East India Company:

> In British eyes, a most dangerous network of sedition was that maintained by Muslims of the purist Tarikh-i Muhamadiyya ('Wahabi') tendency. Many officials came to believe that the whole Muslim community was implicated in Rebellion, fuelling the suspicion which culminated in the Patna conspiracy case a decade later, when Muslims in the capital of Bihar were arraigned for sedition. (2007: 320)

Such perceptions branded Muslims as forever the 'other' of the British rule. As a result, Muslims were persecuted throughout North India. The property of aristocrats and Muslim gentry was confiscated and they were reduced to penury. Worst of all, Muslims were

hounded out of Delhi and were not allowed to return even after a couple of years (Muhammad 1969: 32). Muhammad further quotes from a Persian daily, *Durbin*, published from Calcutta to describe the state of affairs:

> All sorts of employment, great and small, are being gradually snatched away from the Mohammadans, and bestowed on men of other races…. The Government is bound to look upon all classes of its subjects with an equal eye, yet the time has now come when it publicly singles out the Mohammadans in its Gazette for exclusion from official posts. Recently, when several vacancies occurred in the office of the Sunderbans Commissioner, that official in advertising them in the Government Gazette stated that the appointments would be given to none other but Hindus. In short, the Mohammadans have now sunk so low that even when qualified for Government notifications, nobody takes any notice of their helpless condition, and the higher authorities do not deign to acknowledge their existence. (14 July 1869, quoted in Muhammad 1969: 33-34)

The condition of Muslims at the hands of British officials has been vividly captured by Hali, Syed Ahmad's contemporary and biographer. He writes:

> As usual, the Muslims were the main target for the Government's wrath. The Indians, in an outward pretence of loyalty to the Government, were quite openly having their revenge on the Muslims. *To incriminate a Muslim there was no need for any proof. His merely being a Muslim was enough to establish his guilt* and no Muslim could expect any sympathy from the Government. (61; emphasis added)

The condition presented by Hali offers itself for a complicated understanding of the society in the early second half of the nineteenth century.[18] The use of "As usual" in the beginning of the above quotation points to the fact that there was a great tension between the East India Company as the new ruling power and Muslims as a category who were the earlier ruling powers. Hali seems to point out that the animosity between the British and the Muslims was not the result only of the events of 1857 but had a more complicated

[18] There is a contemporary ring to this portrayal of the condition of being Muslim by Hali. Hali's account could have found a place in any newspaper report in contemporary India or even the world at large especially after Babri mosque demolition in 1992 or Gujarat riots of 2002 or in the Bush government strike against Muslim countries after the 11 September 2002 which is popularly known at 9/11

history which began with the consolidation of the East India Company as a ruling power in India. There is an important word which offers a clue to the 'Muslim' question in 1857 or after that. Hali uses the word 'Indian'. The 'Indians' were taking revenge against Muslims and by doing thus showing their loyalty to the government. The 'Indians' here can be taken to be Hindus. It is interesting that Hali equates Hindus with 'Indians'. It leaves us with questions such as whether Muslims not considered themselves as Indians; and whether it was only Hali who equates Hindus with Indians or it was the general feeling among the Muslim society in general or whether it was a British colonial formation which Hali used. It can also be inferred that Indians/Hindus were targeting Muslims in order to demonstrate their loyalty to the British rule, that is, there was a socio-political alignment between Hindus and the British where both acted as a common force against the entire Muslim community. This alignment also effectively blocked out Muslims' access to justice as they were already branded guilty and there was no requirement of any proof. Just as the category 'Hindu' morphed easily into the category 'Indian' in the same way the category 'Muslim' morphed, for the British rule into the category of 'guilty'.

Historically speaking, the British colonialism spread over India by annexing different territories all over the country. Most of these territories were occupied by the Mughals or those Muslim rulers who broke away from the Mughals and established their independent rule. The British officials were certainly aware of the fact that there was a wide discontent among the Muslim elite from whom the Company wrested control over the land. Muhammad (1969) also points to the fact that the Hindus were not threatened so much by the British rule as the Muslims were. The Hindus joined British schools and took their lessons in English as it mattered little to them whether the language was Persian or Urdu or English. Even with the fact that both Hindus and Muslims participated in the

events of 1857, it was clear for the British officials that the old rule even if it had been restored would have been the Muslim rule and not the Hindu rule or the Sikh rule and this awareness tilted the balance in favour of the Hindus. It can be argued that in the light of historical facts, this was just too simple an understanding of the situation but it was the official line of British colonial rulers especially after 1857. In any case, this equation of Indians as Hindus and branding Muslims as the 'other' of the British came to be articulated for the first time in India around 1857 and it was cemented in modern Indian history forever, that is to say in the colonial history of modern India with J. S. Mills in the lead.

The de-legitimization of the Muslims in the post-1857 India can be argued to be co-terminus with the emergence of Indian nation. This nation came to be associated with the Hindus much more readily than the Muslims as Hali's use of the term Indians shows. The cultural hegemony of the majoritarian community further pushed the Muslims to the margins of the national narrative. Partha Chatterjee notes that:

> the formation of a hegemonic 'national culture' was *necessarily* built upon a system of exclusion. Ideas of freedom, equality and cultural refinement went hand in hand with a set of dichotomies which systematically excluded from the new life of the nation the vast masses of people whom the dominant elite would represent and lead, but who could never be culturally integrated with their leaders. Both colonial rulers and their nationalist opponents conspired to displace in the colonial world the original structure of meanings associated with western bourgeois notions of right, freedom, equality, etc. The inauguration of the national state in India could not mean a universalization of the bourgeois notion of 'man'. (2010: 251; emphasis in the original)

As a result of this de-legitimization, the Muslim elite had to bring into existence their own mode of 'inner sovereignty' against the 'outer' world of colonial modernity. This exercise ran parallel to Hindu elites' exercise of 'inner sovereignty'. Syed Ahmad is one of the most famous examples who sought to exercise such 'inner sovereignty' among the Muslim community in North India.

3.6 Syed Ahmad and Formation of the 'Self'

The 1857 Revolt began on 10 May 1857 from Meerut (in erstwhile United Provinces). It soon spread across many towns and cities of North India and within weeks different leaders came to lead the revolt from different places. The Meerut rebels reached Delhi and declared Bahadur Shah Zafar the emperor of India. Many cities were taken over by the rebels and it was only after couple of months that the British troops could manage to re-establish their rule. Bahadur Shah Zafar was taken captive and sent to Burma in exile as a punishment but in many places the British took more than a year to re-establish their control.[19]

At the time of this upheaval, Syed Ahmad was posted in Bijnaur where he helped many British families to secure safe passages. His loyalty to the government was taken note of at the highest level. When he reached Meerut, Cracroft-Wilson, the judge and special commissioner of Meerut came to see him at the hospital and showered him with praises on behalf of the government. He conveyed that the government has been aware of his loyalty (Hali 50-51). But the persecution of Muslims after this event left Syed Ahmad broken-hearted. His property in Delhi was ransacked by the East India Company troops.[20] After his cousin Hashim Ali Khan and uncle Vahid ud Din had been murdered by the troops, most of the members of the family left for Sultan Nizamuddin. Only his mother remained behind along with an aunt of Syed Ahmad. When the troops ransacked his

[19] A more detailed account of this event and its causes as well its reading is beyond the scope of this thesis. But the revolt has been the topic of intense research and writing right from 1857-58 itself and numerous volumes keeps on coming out looking at the event from different perspectives. For a brief account of causes and the extent of the revolt as well as its reception and interpretation in India and England, see P. C. Joshi (2007). Another important and interesting reading is provided by C. A. Bayly (2007). Bayly reads 1857 as a struggle between the intelligence gathering and information system of British colonial rule as well as those who planned the revolt.

[20] Hali uses the word 'troops' for the group which murdered Syed Ahmad's cousin and uncle whereas Syed Ahmad's first biographer, G. F. I. Graham writes that they were slain by the "infuriated Sikhs" (Graham 1885: 28). That the "Sikhs" were part of the British troop was the fact that Graham does not mention. If we read Graham and Hali together, we can say that the killers were part of the government troops and Graham, a lieutenant-Colonel himself, tries to pin the blame on the 'Indians' themselves and absolves the East India Company or the British government totally of any responsibility. Graham's description is an act of deliberate obfuscation, at least in this instance. See Khaldun (2007: 37-41) for an account why Sikhs did not participate in the 1857 Revolt.

house, his mother and aunt had to seek shelter in a nearby building. Syed Ahmad found them in a very bad condition. They were without water for three days (Hali 51). It was a moment of intense soul-searching for him. For some time, he thought of leaving India itself and migrating to Egypt but decided against it as he realized that:

> it would be cowardly of me, almost inhuman, to run away to safety while my community was lying in ruins. No, it was my duty to share its misfortune and do all in my power to dispel them. I gave up the idea of running away and chose to devote myself to my people. (in Hali 56)

This was the first instance where Syed Ahmad found himself so intricately attached to his community. The realization of the 'self' as bound with that of the community took firm roots in his understanding. It can be argued that this identification of the 'self' with the community also has to do with the way the revolt was looked at through the prism of religion by the British colonial officers. His own experience also convinced him that the government has picked on his community for being solely responsible for the mutiny. This awareness brought him to the conclusion that it is he who has to do to take up mantle of being a savior of his own community. At this point of time, the 'self' which characterized Syed Ahmad was not defined against the 'Hindu' other but it was rather against the 'British' other. Now, it has been noted above that in Hali's account Hindus were Indians. This can mean that the Indian 'self' for Hali was the Hindu 'self' and it was defined against the Muslim 'other'. The Hindu 'self' assisted by the British government resulted into new alignments. This new Hindu-British alignment pushed the Muslim to a position where they were doubly marginalized, that is, the Muslim came to be defined as the 'other' of the Hindu 'self' and as well as the 'other' of the British 'self'. This alignment was perfectly in sync with the British colonial historiography. But Syed Ahmad's understanding of the position of his community, at least in 1857, was not of the doubly 'other'. Rather, he defined the Muslim 'self' against the British 'other' or to put it differently, Muslims were the 'other' of the British 'self'. It totally leaves out Hindus.

The Hindu as a category does creep in Syed Ahmad's formulation but it was to happen later in the late 1860s. At least in the 1857, the equation was Muslim vis-à-vis British. This play of 'self/other' can be easily seen as problematizing of Said's rather neat figuration of European 'self' vis-à-vis non-European 'other'. What Said does not account for is that there is an exercise of complex formation of 'self/other' among the colonized population as well. Syed Ahmad's understanding of 'self/other' is not a simple or linear one. He rather inverts the binary to begin with. He looked at himself as not the 'other' of the British 'self' but figured himself as a Muslim 'self' defined against the British 'other'. Later on in the chapter, I argue that the position of the 'other' was occupied by different people at different times in Syed Ahmad's politics.

Once the alignment of the 'self' vis-à-vis the 'other' was established, Syed Ahmad went on to fashion his response to this 'other'. This response should also be read as the response to the colonial rule. We know that most of the responses to colonialism begin with searching for the source of colonial power and the causes of one's own subordination. Syed Ahmad also looked for the source of British power and authority and causes of the Muslim subordination. In the course of the rest of his life, he discovered the source of British power in its modern institutions such as parliament, modern military, bureaucracy, but most of all in the British education system which resulted in the development of science and technology as well as the rest of the institutions of modern Britain. It is not difficult to understand that following this pattern Syed Ahmad would inevitably come to the conclusion that the Muslims in India are not as good as the British because they 'lack' precisely what the British possesses—'modern education system'. For Syed Ahmad the 'lack' of modern education system along with modern institutions was the cause of Muslim subordination. This uncritical and unreflective acceptance of the modern institutions of the British came up in a very powerful way in much of the

nineteenth century. Syed Ahmad did not pause to reflect how the British came to be a colonial power or the history behind Industrial revolution in England and Europe at large. But at the time, Syed Ahmad chose education as the most important site of social development and so began his life-long effort to educate the community so that it can match upto the level of the British 'other'. Christopher Shackle notes:

> Sir Sayyid's prescription for the successful future of the Muslims of India was that they should let go of their attachment to their former outlook and practice. They must cease to withdraw from the new order which the British were creating in India and instead learn to participate in it with great enthusiasm. (9)

But before that quest for education, Syed Ahmad's immediate reaction to the British colonialism was that of accommodation. His stated purpose became to dispel the misconception of the British that 'Muslims' as a community were against their rule or that Muslims were forever planning to overthrow the British rule. He sought cooperation between the Muslims as a community and the British rule. (9-10)

One of the first responses of Syed Ahmad to the British colonial rule was that of understanding the cause of the 1857 Revolt which he termed as 'Mutiny'. It was understandable as the Mutiny brought about the complete breakdown of the relationship between the British and the Muslims. His analysis of the causes resulted into the publication of the pamphlet *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* (*Causes of the Indian Revolt*) in 1859. The pamphlet was daring in its content and Syed Ahmad was advised by his friends not to show it to anybody for the fear of incurring the displeasure of the government (Hali 62). But Syed Ahmad made up his mind and sent one copy to the government in India and 500 copies to England. The pamphlet was received, surprisingly, positively by the government and most of the official considered it to be "a sincere and friendly report" (Hali 63). Syed Ahmad enumerated the following major causes for the revolt of 1857:

1. Ignorance on the part of the people; by which I mean misapprehension of the intentions of Government.
2. The passing of such laws and regulations and forms of procedure as jarred with the established customs and practice of Hindustan, and the introduction of such as were in themselves objectionable.
3. Ignorance on the part of the Government of the condition of the people, of their modes of thought and of life, and of the grievances through which their hearts were becoming estranged.
4. The neglect on the part of our rulers of such points as were essential to the good government of Hindustan.
5. The bad management and disaffection of the army. (in Muhammad 1972: 20)

As can be seen from the above conclusions, Syed Ahmad made an all-round critique of the colonial policies in India. It lamented the absence of any Indian voice in the highest decision-making body which could address the concerns of the public to the government and communicate the plans and policies of the government to the public. Syed Ahmad sought to bridge this gap and it can be said that he also positioned himself as a bridge between the government and the Muslim community. It is important to remember that the demands reflected in this pamphlet were similar to those proposed by the Indian National Congress when it was established in 1885, twenty-six years after the publication of *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* and it is still more interesting to note that Syed Ahmad vociferously opposed the formation of the Indian National Congress and was its most vocal opponent till his death in 1898. This opposition which looks paradoxical at this moment will emerge later on as consistent with the gradual change in the thoughts of Syed Ahmad.

In order to strengthen the case of the Muslim community in the eyes of the government, Syed Ahmed published in 1860, *The Loyal Mohammedans of India*, an account of those Muslims who remained loyal to the government during the revolt of

1857. It was directed to both: the government as well as the public. It aimed to provide the government an account of how some Muslims have remained loyal to them and by doing so, the books aimed to silence once and for all "the clamouring against the so-called treachery of the Muslims which we hear these days from every direction" (in Hali 66). At the same time the book also spoke to the Muslim community and argued that it is wrong to believe that the government is conspiring against it. The government's recognition of Muslims' loyalty in the form of bestowing gifts, property and pensions was the proof of that the government harbours no ill-will towards the community (Hali 67).

3.7 Syed Ahmad and the Response to the Logic of Colonialism

In his book, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Ashis Nandy argues that colonialism does not depend so much on material power, rather it relies on its ability to construct new modes of thinking. Colonialism has the ability to create secular hierarchies which contest the traditional hierarchies, thereby making modernity more logical to accept. This construction sets up a psychological pull in the mind of the colonized (2005: ix). Investigating the three notions of modernity—progress, normality and masculinity—Nandy argues that universalism under which normality is offered is confined by the processes and practices of colonialism (2005: x).

Nandy differentiates between two phases of colonialism. The first phase was the violent colonialism of bandit kings which represented brute racism and power over the body of the natives. The second phase of colonialism, according to Nandy came in a more sophisticated form. This new kind of colonialism, which came in the aftermath of European enlightenment, shifts the site of colonialism from body to mind. It can linger even after the physical structure of colonialism is overthrown (2005: xi).

Nandy uses the categories of age and sex to argue how colonialism crept into the psyche of the colonized. Using age as a category to define the history of civilization, colonialism argued that the West occupied the position of an adult which is civilized as against Africa which still is a child and primitive and growing up as barbarian youth. Colonialism took upon itself the task of civilizing barbaric youth. India presented a different set of challenges as it could not be slotted into the category of childhood given its thousands of years of civilization. So, stretching the logic of age, it was slotted into the category of old-age, that is, past its prime. Again it is the responsibility of the civilized West to bring India back from its present condition of senility to its past civilized state (2005: 18). Nandy cites the reform movements which took place in the nineteenth century India to show how the leaders of such reform movements had internalized the logic of colonial homology of age and stages of civilization.

The colonial logic of sex, Nandy argues, uses three categories: *purusatva* (masculinity), *naritva* (femininity) and *klibatva* (hermaphroditism or androgyny). The old binary of masculinity/femininity was replaced by the colonialism with the new binary of masculinity/androgyny where masculine British ruled over effeminate Indians (2005: 7-8). The much used image of effeminate Begnali babu is a case in point. This effeminate Bengali was all devoid of *ksatratej* (marital valour) and was the punching bag of both British colonial officers as well as Indian social and political reformers for a very long time.

Nandy uses some nineteenth century Indian figures to demonstrate how the colonial response given by these figures played into the colonial logic itself and as a result never got out of it. The Indian figures Nandy chooses are Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) through his tragedy *Meghnadvadh* tries to translate the western notion of masculinity into the Indian forms. He legitimized the unfettered *raksasi* (demonic) masculinity of Ravana and Meghnada over "effeminate, ineffective pseudo-ascetics" Rama and Lakshmana. By doing this he made "salient" what was "in fetters" in the traditional Indian masculinity (2005: 21). Bankim (1838-94) responded to colonialism by taking the mythical figure of "soft, childlike, self-contradictory, sometimes immoral, sexually playful and androgynous" Krishna and turning him into a "respectable, righteous, didactic, and hard god" who was out there to protect the glories of Hinduism (2005: 23-24). Both, Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda tried to 'Christianize' the Hinduism they found in India by attempting to make it into an organized religion having an authoritative text on the lines of Islam and Christianity. For Dayanand it was '*Vedas*' and for Vivekananda, it was '*Bhagvad Gita*' (2005: 25). In Chapter II, I have argued that Syed Ahmad could be slotted into the category of those responses to colonialism which bought into the logic of colonial superiority and sought to emulate what was best in them [colonial powers]. Here, it is possible to read Syed Ahmad in the category to which Bankim, Dayanand and Vivekananda belong. However, his position was crucially different from these other three. Like the three, Syed Ahmad also acknowledged the superiority of the colonial power in its material aspects. But, while the rest sought to fashion a 'national response' to counter the colonial rule, Syed Ahmad sought to fashion a 'national response' which sought collaboration with the British rule. But still, the self/other problematic haunted Syed Ahmad too.

For Nandy, these figures—Bankim, Dayanand, Vivekananda—responded to colonialism by internalizing the colonial logic itself and for that reason they never got out of that logic and thus never achieved freedom from the mindset of colonialism. Nandy

argues that it is only by defying the logic of colonial framework of dissent or engagement a person can be psychologically liberated. He found this liberation in Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar but the most powerful actor of this new way of response to colonialism was Gandhi who defied every psychological structure of colonialism and turned every binary on its head to get out of the colonial trap. But that discussion is not important to my argument here.

This analysis will use the second most important event[21] in the life of Syed Ahmad which was his visit to London from April 1869 to December 1870. Every biographer and critic of Syed Ahmad considers this visit to be the watershed moment in his life (Muhammad 1969: 52; Lelyveld 105; Hasan and Zaidi 6). This seventeen month visit to the metropole created a severe crisis in the 'self' formation of Syed Ahmad and every moment of his stay in England was spent in formulating a response to the colonial 'other'. The account of the visit to London was published as *Musafiri-i Landan* which got translated in English only very recently in 2011 by Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi as *A Voyage to Modernism: Syed Ahmed Khan*. In their "Introduction" to the translated text, Hasan and Zaidi point out that "Even though his [Syed Ahmad's] portrait of England is sometimes facile, his account of travels opens the door to new questions, particularly because this was the period when the relations between Europeans and Indians were at the centre of many debates" (Hasan and Zaidi 4). For me, there is no moment of being 'facile' in Syed Ahmad's account as everything he writes reflected a mind which was furiously trying to fashion something new and every attempt of his was being thwarted from different sides. This was not simply a case of the relationship between "Europeans and Indians" but more importantly it was a psychological battle of a Faustian scale. The next section discusses the contours of this epic battle.

[21] The first most important event in Syed Ahmad's life must be the established of the MAO College.

3.8 Encounter with the Metropole: Churning of the 'Self'

Syed Ahmad accompanied his youngest son, Syed Mahmud, to England along with the elder son Syed Hamid, a friend and a servant. Syed Mahmud had won a scholarship in 1869 for study in England. He gave various official and private reasons for the journey ranging from the desire to see the modern institutions of Britain: commercial, medical and educational. Another reason he gave was that he wished to prepare a refutation of William Muir's *Life of Muhammad* and the required material for this work was located in London's India Office Library only. Later on in life, he reminisced that he wished to attain an insight into the English education system (Lelyveld 105). His accounts were published in the newsletter of Scientific Society at Aligarh. *A Voyage to Modernism: Syed Ahmed Khan* also contains letters to Mohsinul Mulk Syed Mehdi Ali Khan who was Syed Ahmad's close friend and many of the letters from London were addressed to him.

The travel account begins with the journey from Benaras to Bombay and then the outward ship journey. The narrative is full of wonder at the technological marvels of Europe such as the ship itself, the Suez Canal, light houses, trains, ports, etc. It recounts his meetings with Lords, Ladies, Dukes and other elites of the Victorian England, his visits to different institutions such as universities, clubs, parliament, royal court of Queen Victoria, factories, warehouses, engineering workshops, etc. Every account of such visits is full of wonder and amazement and almost immediately every such account is followed by a comparison to those of India and inevitably the tone of wonder transforms into a tone of pathetic resignation. Syed Ahmad compared everything he encountered in England to its Indian counterpart and found how miserably the Indian counterpart failed. This marveling, juxtaposition and a sigh of resignation become the trope of the text. In his

letter to Raja Jaikishan Das, the secretary of the Scientific Society, Aligarh, Syed Ahmad writes:

> I've been to the congregations of Lords and Dukes and attended their magnificent banquets and meetings …. On all these occasions, I've also had the opportunity to see Ladies, the elite and educated women of their society …. I have seen the warehouses of rich merchants and the shops of average shopkeepers and have seen the way they store their ware.… I have seen craftsmen and porters, huge palatial mansions and museums, workshops of engineers, factories that make ships and tanks, telegraph factory which manufacture cables that are laid inside the ocean connecting two parts of the world, warships…. What I concurred from all this is that we Hindustanis make a mistake when we accuse the British of rude behaviour (though I still do not absolve them of this charge) and say that they consider Hindustanis inferior and no better than animals. The truth is that they are right in what they think; we are actually like this. *Without exaggeration, I can really say that all Hindustanis, higher and lower, rich and poor, traders and workers, learned and ignorant, match up to British etiquettes and culture just as the filthiest of beasts matches to a nice and able man.* Now, would you accord respect or honour to a beast? Do you bother whether you are polite or impolite with beasts? Never! Likewise, *there is no reason why the British should not consider Hindustanis in Hindustan, as beasts.* Although my fellow-countrymen would take my writings as very harsh wondering what it is that we lack and what superiority the British have that I write this way. But their shock is hardly a matter of surprise. (Khan 2011: 176-177; emphasis added)

This quote can be analyzed using Nandy's framework of internalization of the logic of colonialism. The colonized willingly accepts the colonizer's characterization of the colonial society. The physical infrastructure of the metropole is enough to bring in Nandy's phase two of colonialism. The physical colonialism moves to the more sophisticated level and colonizes the mind of the subject. What is interesting in the above quote is the speed of this shift from the physical to the psychic. The living pictures of craftsmen and porters, huge palatial mansions and museums, workshops, factories, ships and tanks, telegraph factory and warships all these metamorphoses into a mental construct of a 'self' which is defeated even before the contest with the 'other' begins. This is the

moment where a colonized 'self' starts looking itself as the 'other' of the colonizer 'self'. The subject is left with no option but to speak the language of the colonial logic. Nandy's homology of age and the stage of civilization can be clearly seen in the above quote. Syed Ahmad willingly adopts the backward 'self' which is bestial and which looks with wide eyes at the civilized 'other'. Moreover, this backward 'self' encompasses the entire community, in fact, the nation itself, thus giving further credence to the claim that the entire nation is lagging behind on the timescale of civilization. This was the point where the psychological battle, in Nandy's formulation, was won by the colonial Raj (2005: 7). Further, Syed Ahmad finds the reason for this state of being or the cause of colonial superiority in the following passage:

> God has blessed Europe, particularly England, with all those spiritual and worldly qualities that man should ideally possess. By spiritual qualities, I mean how excellently well they follow the tenets of the religion they believe in, something rarely seen among the followers of any other religion in the world. This is because men and women are generally educated and the entire community is mindful of these matters. *If the majority in Hindustan also attain education, Hindustanis, given our natural traits, may not surpass but will surely match the British*. (Khan 2011: 178; emphasis added)

Two reasons have been recounted in the above passage for the superiority of the British. First is other worldly (spirituality) while the second is this worldly (education). Although not specified explicitly, but the assertion "they follow the tenets of the religion they believe in" can be analysed using Nandy's frame of colonial logic where the colonized, even when they are spiritual, are superstitious. By putting this binary in place, the colonial logic ensures that the only option left for the colonizer is to fight the binary by trying to reach upto the level of colonial spirituality and in this process the colonized turns into a mimic or a caricature. Even if Syed Ahmad has no doubt about the spirituality of his countrymen (or even Muslims only), the emphasis is on following the tenets of the

religion. But the other worldly aspect is closely tied to the this worldly aspect of education. Education is the bridge which has made the colonizers aware of their spirituality. The only way to reach upto the standard of the colonizing master is to to attain education. If the colonizer's 'other' attains education, it can reach upto the level of the colonizer's 'self'. Even in this formulation the limit is very clear. The colonized can only match upto the level of the colonizer. There is no question of surpassing the colonial master. The mimic will always remain a mimic; it can never aspire to surpass the original. The 'other' can aspire to become the 'self' but it can never transcend it. Transcending will break the colonial logic which Syed Ahmad is not in a position to even envision so colonialism persists. According to Nandy, this psychic life of colonialism will persist even after the end of the physical colonialism.

The use of the word 'pity' is outstanding in the narrative. Everything evokes pity for his own people in Syed Ahmad. Some instances of this feeling of 'pity':

1. I really admired Bombay's Parsi community. They have begun to progress in a very impressive way. In my opinion, their efforts are better directed and more praiseworthy than the Bengalis. It is, however, a pity that Muslims are left behind everywhere. (Khan 2011: 70)
2. Two Hindus have come from Bombay to appear in the Civil Services Examination. It's a pity that Muslims are always left behind. (Khan 2011: 154)
3. Alas! The Muslims in India are in a wreck and there is none to rescue them. Such a pity! (Khan 2011: 196)

Here it is not the entire nation which is the 'self'. The national 'self' slips into the communal 'self' and it is juxtaposed against communal 'others'. This brings into picture the concept of being doubly 'other' which has been discussed earlier. The Muslim as a community becomes the 'other' of both: British 'self' and non-British 'self' which includes Hindus, Parsis, Bengalis, etc. Again the desire is to reach upto the level of the 'self' in order to gain respect, both social and economic. This communal 'self' of Syed

Ahmad kept fighting its own brethren throughout his life. In this communal 'self' he was pitted against the most virulent and orthodox Muslims. Every action of his was criticized by different sections of *ulamas* and other members of *sharif* culture such as the famous poet Akbar Allahabadi. He had to keep answering the charges of this group of people. The attack was always on his religious practices which were considered by orthodox Muslims as a negation of the *Quran* and *Shariat*. Syed Ahmad throughout his life answered those charges by providing a modern interpretation of Islam. But he was not able to satisfy his antagonists. It is here that his communal 'self' collapses and turns into an individual 'self' which was guided by rational enlightenment of modernity.

Apart from the constant self-flagellation over the decadence of his own community and nation, Syed Ahmad searched for the source of the colonial power. As discussed above he found this source in education. Education provided a tool for Syed Ahmad which he could use to fashion a new 'self' which would match up to the British and for that to happen the model must be the model of the master itself. The search for the model took Syed Ahmad to the Cambridge University. Before going into that major exercise of 'self-fashioning', it is important to look at the other concerns which occupied him. Throughout his stay in London, Syed Ahmad constantly wrote articles and books contradicting the colonial portrayal of Islam and Muslims.

One of the express motives of Syed Ahmad of coming to London was to refute the negative portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad by William Muir in his book *Life of Muhammad*. He visited Indian Office Library and British Museum Library to collect material in order to write a refutation of Muir's distorted description of Islam and the Prophet. Although Syed Ahmad could not finish writing the book but he published his response to Muir's charges as *A Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammad, and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* in English. Muir's book was not the first one to interpret Islam and the

Muslims in a negative light and it was certainly not the last. Although Syed Ahmad heaved a sigh of relief after publishing the refutation to Muir's charges, the exercise appeared to be a futile one as soon after W. W. Hunter published a book named *The Indian Musalmans* in 1871-72 and it again contained the same stereotype of Islam and Muslims. Syed Ahmad wrote a refutation to Hunter's book too. In fact, Syed Ahmad took his religion seriously and tried to fashion it anew by giving it a modern interpretation consistent with the post-enlightenment rationality and science.

A third aspect of Syed Ahmad's journey was his meetings with the elites of the Victorian England. He moved in aristocratic circles, was invited to parties and was feted by Dukes and Lords, met the Queen, attended the royal court and met the highest officials of the British colonial regime in India. He was awarded the 'Companion of Star of India'. This part of his stay in England calls for another analysis of his fashioning of the 'self'. This 'self' is not newly fashioned one, rather it continues from Syed Ahmad's creation of the 'self' after the 1857 Revolt. It was a 'self' which sought accommodation and cooperation with the 'other' or to reverse the equation, it was the colonized 'other' which sought compromise and cooperation with the colonial 'self' by constantly reminding the colonial 'self that the colonized 'other' would not try to usurp the position of the colonial 'self'. It wished to survive and prosper by maintaining its 'otherness' and by trying to imitate the colonial 'self' in order to gain some social and economic respectability. This fashioning of the colonized 'self' by Syed Ahmad got colonial recognition and he was considered to be the loyal subject of the Empire. It was this 'self' which Syed Ahmad carried to England and was feted everywhere. Syed Ahmad could never come out of this 'self' to see its fallacy. This 'self' helped him individually throughout his life but the national 'self' or the communal 'self' which he wished to create never materialized.

3.9 Constructing the Educated 'Self'

Education was not a new topic with Syed Ahmad. Even before coming to England, he pursued his own education in different disciplines and in most of the matter he was self-taught. In 1859, he opened his first educational institute, a Persian *madarasa* in Moradabad where he was posted at the time. Later on this *madarasa* merged into a government school (Hali 58-59). In 1859, he wrote a pamphlet criticizing the government vernacular schools. Arguing along the lines of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, he wrote that vernacular medium should be used only when it is capable of carrying the weight of new knowledge. As Urdu was not suitable for imparting modern education of sciences, English should be the language of instruction. He was to change this view later on. In 1863, he established the Scientific Society in Ghazipur in order to translate the modern knowledge available in English into Urdu. He also established a school in Ghazipur entirely with the help of public funding. The schools imparted instructions in five languages—English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit (Hali 86). From being the advocate of English medium education in 1859, Syed Ahmad shifted his position a decade later and advocated education in the mother tongue. While in England, he argued that it is only because the country's entire education system is in its own language, there is progress in all fields. If Hindustan has to achieve the same sort of greatness, it has to provide education in Urdu which was understood in northern and western provinces (Khan 2011: 185). The emphasis on mother tongue is almost Himalayan in proportion, literally!

> Those who are sincerely concerned about Hindustan should know that its progress depends only on making available the entire spectrum of knowledge of the various sciences in their own language. I am of the opinion that these words should be etched in bold letters on the Himalayas that, 'if all knowledge is not made available to Hindustan in its own language, the country will never progress. This is the truth. This is the truth. This is the truth.' (Khan 2011: 185)

Like all prototypes, the perfect education system was also an English education system. In a letter to his friend Mehdi Ali Khan, he writes "Had you been here, you would have seen how education and culture is attained, the methods of educating children, how knowledge is acquired, and how a *nation earns respect*" (Khan 2011: 186; emphasis added). Like all things British, the colonized 'self' tries to fashion itself on the model of colonial 'other'. A visit to the Cambridge University evokes a sense of awe in Syed Ahmad. The Cambridge University was:

> the great antiquity of that seat of learning and the muses and the worldwide reputation it owes to so many eminent men whose talents and labours have contributed, in no small degree, to spread throughout the world the light of knowledge, thus scattering the darkness of ignorance and the mists of error and prejudices. (Khan 2011: 225)

There is absolutely no awareness or even acknowledgement of the fact that the 'awe-inspiring' Cambridge University also produces those great men who go out in the world and colonize other countries and societies. Rather, this seat of absolute brilliance became the model for Syed Ahmad which he planned to offer to his own community so that it can become equal to the colonial masters. He could not see the paradox inherent in such institutions which proclaim to offer liberal education of equality, freedom and brotherhood and the people who receive such education practice everything opposite to the liberal doctrine when they serve in the colonies. But, the paradox caught up with the institution Syed Ahmad built when he came back to India. The following section discusses this paradox.

3.10 The Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College and the Paradox of Muslim Emancipation

Soon after coming back to India, Syed Ahmad went about his plan to establish a college on the lines of Oxford-Cambridge universities and public school system of

Britain. In December 1870, he formed a Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among Muhammadans of India. Syed Ahmad's plan of a college met with fierce opposition from many quarters. It was on the suggestion of Syed Mahmud that the committee decided to open a school first so that it would give an idea to the people as to what sort of college is being planned. This school began its functioning in 1875 thus giving birth to the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College (also known as the MAO College). The college itself started its formal operation only from 1877. Through the commitment of Syed Ahmad, it survived the initial shocks and by the time he passed away in 1898, the college was well-poised to secure a future. In 1920, the MAO College was elevated to the status of a university and it was rechristened as Aligarh Muslim University. The name itself justified its birth and its reason for existence. It was visualized by its founder as the institution of higher education to enable the next generation of his community to receive the same education as the colonial masters do and this was to be the source of salvation for the community.

With all the noble intentions behind the college, it was doomed to fall short of its goal to provide a different kind of education. Although Syed Ahmad always wished the college to be independent of the government funding, it was not possible to run the college purely on private donations. As soon as the college began, the government funding became inevitable and the governmental control followed soon. But it can be argued that even without the government funding, the college could not have been free from the framework of higher education established by the colonial government in India. The MAO College was affiliated to the Calcutta University in the beginning and later on to the Allahabad University. This affiliation meant that the MAO College or its administration was not free to exercise much independence in the framework of syllabus. It was the university, not the MAO College, which conducted examinations and awarded

degrees. Lelyveld has used an interesting analogy of ghazal poem to refer to this situation at MAO College. The college wished to do many different things but like the ghazal writers, they had to operate within a restricted frame (204).

English as a language loomed large on the educational landscape of MAO College. As discussed above Syed Ahmad had different opinions at different times on the question of the medium of instruction. As discussed above, in 1859, he believed that it was only English which was fit for the medium of instruction but in late 1860s, he changed his views and came to propagate the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. In fact, one of the expressed tasks of the Scientific Society was to translate book of European knowledge into Urdu for better diffusion of such knowledges. Maulavi Zaka Ullah of Delhi translated many volumes of books from English to Urdu at the behest of Syed Ahmed (Andrews 2003). Syed Ahmad's insistence upon the mother tongue got more boost when he travelled to England and saw the entire education in the mother tongue. But the Indian education system as it prevailed in the late nineteenth century did not have the conducive atmosphere for the growth of native languages as a medium of instruction. The Arabic department was abolished in 1885 for the lack of students. By 1880s, Syed Ahmad was disillusioned with his own stand for mother-tongue as the medium of instruction. In his representations to the Hunter Commission in 1882, he lamented the fact that the mother tongue is not fit for becoming the carrier of European knowledge, especially the fields of history, logic, philosophy, political economy and jurisprudence. He argued that Urdu is incapable to carrying such knowledges as it was prone to exaggeration and there was little or no gap between literal and metaphorical meaning in Urdu. It was only English which was fit to be the carrier of such disciplines of knowledge (Lelyveld 206). So, at MAO College, English came to occupy a central organizing principle so much so that subjects such as history, philosophy, logic, natural

sciences became just an excuse to teach the English language, its vocabulary and structure, its genres and styles of exposition as it developed in the history of English literature (Lelyveld 207).[22] The students at the MAO College were expected to make comparative study between the language pattern in English literature (of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, etc.) with those of philosophical and socio-political texts of contemporary English thinkers such as Macaulay and Mills (Lelyveld 207-208). Still, the college focused on developing critical thinking in students and in that, the students were drawn into the debates going on in philosophical circles in England. Some of the questions which were asked in the examinations revealed this. For instance, there was a question, "It is objected to the doctrine of utility that it is impossible to trace an action to all its consequences. Answer this objection" (in Lelyveld 209). Even the questions in history of India were not really about India. Questions such as:

> Sketch the administration of Lord Amherst. Characterize the state of Indian finance at this time.

or

> Trace the progress of education in India during the present century. Mention any measures relating to the press during the same period. (in Lelyveld 210)

point to the colonial nature of history where the only history of India was the history of its colonial rule. Such questions also point to the fact that educators at the MAO College were not thinking in terms of education within the social context of their own students. Rather, the abiding concern was to imitate what was happening in the colonial metropolis and reflect it in the curriculum. Another reading of this will again lead us to the aim of developing facility in English language in terms of framing an argument. Looked at from any point, the MAO College was not so much an exercise in imparting education (in its

[22] In his book, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, William de Bary notes that the MAO College imbibed the spirit of Macaulay's project of tuning Indians into a mimic of the English tastes. He writes that Syed Ahmad wanted the college to "to form a class of persons, Muhammedan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect" (in Lelyveld 278). This project can be read, I argue, as not an education in English but rather an English education.

philosophical sense) as it was an exercise in 'self-fashioning' of an entire community. Syed Ahmad's project must be seen in terms of the formation of 'national subjectivity'—the development of a 'national subject' who could compare equally with any colonial official trained in British liberal education system. So, to argue that this education system was designed to produce clerks for the British rule would be a mistake. The curriculum as well as examination pattern were focused to produce 'leaders' as was the case with liberal education in England. Commenting on the education at the MAO College, Lelyveld writes:

> It was not an education to inspire meek submission. At least the curriculum was not designed for that purpose. It was a curriculum conceived as training for leadership. Men who lead other men, it was assumed, must understand the moral foundations of individual action and social institutions. They must also have the verbal skills to articulate goals and persuading others. They can develop such understanding and skill by the close study of languages as it has been used by great men of the past. And a necessary condition of such learning is self-discipline and the ability to overcome difficulty. (212)

It was with this aim in mind that Syed Ahmad got a series of British teachers at the MAO College who were educated at the Cambridge University.[23] Some of these teachers were the union presidents at Cambridge and thus they were considered to be natural choices for training Aligarh graduates into future leaders. They were also expected to turn Syed Ahmad's dream of moulding the MAO College into a prototype of the Cambridge University.

In the light of the above discussion, it will be important to examine whether the MAO College really fulfilled the dream of its founder. The MAO College and its history tells us paradoxical stories. The college was envisioned as a Muslim institution but for more than a decade most of its students were Hindus, it is only after 1889, that the

[23] Theodore Beck, A. W. Arnold, Theodore Morison, Walter Raleigh and Harold Cox were among the early teachers of MAO College in its first twenty-five years of existence.

number of Hindu students dropped significantly. More importantly, the college was to symbolize Syed Ahmad's dream of community self-help without any help or interference from the government. This dream, as mentioned above, had to be given away for the lack of funds from the public and the government came in with funds as well as regulations. In fact, if we look at Syed Ahmad's trip to England and his description of community supported institutions, we will find a huge historical gap in his account. Syed Ahmad's stay in England was the time of great educational churning in England. It was in 1870 that Forster's Education Act came into existence and led to the growth of state-sponsored school education system. Lelyveld characterizes it aptly saying that Syed Ahmad, in his effort to find a model of education, chose "the very principle that England was at the moment of beginning to abandon in the field of education" (114).There is a rich irony in this situation. The colonized 'other' starts adopting the practice of the colonial 'self' in order to match upto the colonial 'self' but by the time the copying begins, the colonial 'self' abandoned that 'self' and adopted a new 'self' leaving the colonized 'other' in a state of bewilderment. This becomes a case of pathetic mimicry. There were further shortcomings in the cherished principles of the public school system in England. Lelyveld points to the fact that in 1860s, a Royal Commission was instituted which found serious educational inadequacies and financial scandals in more than a couple of dozens of public schools, both of which were results of institutional inbreeding. Syed Ahmad was either totally unaware of these developments or chose to ignore them; but he was chasing a colonial dream which was turning into dust in the colonial metropole itself. The stay in England and his experience of seeing chapels in public schools brought in the idea of religion in his scheme of education. As quoted above, he came to link education and spirituality as the source of British greatness. The secular framework of education took on a religious turn in the supposedly secular colonial mother country.

But the richest paradox of the MAO College was the vision of its founder and the prototype he chose for it. Syed Ahmad's educational vision was for rational, scientific and technological education which put Britain into the forefront of civilization and that was the education he wished for his own community. But the model he chose for his college was everything but scientific or technological. Lelyveld writes:

> For the model he selected represented to its advocates in England a commitment to continuity and permanence, and a very explicit rejection of the whole scientific and technological point of view. Oxford, Cambridge, and the public schools were designed for the landed aristocracy and gentry of England – Cabinet ministers, members of parliament, upper civil servants, army officers, and clergy – but not for the entrepreneurial, managerial, or technological personnel of the country. The goal was "moral perfection" to qualify men for social leadership. (115-116)

For the purpose of using education as a tool for dynamic changes in his community, Syed Ahmad unwittingly chose a model which stood for conservative continuity and which negated any dynamic change. But Lelyveld offers another reading of this choice. According to this reading, it was Syed Ahmad's most ardent wish to see the British and Muslims in India participate in a common social milieu and the British-style public school was the easiest possible route to that destination (118). This was the bond which Nandy terms as "identification with the aggressor" as a defence mechanism on the part of the colonized. Nandy elaborates it as:

> In the colonial culture, identification with the aggressor bound the rulers and the ruled in an unbreakable dyadic relationship. The Raj saw Indians as crypto-barbarians who needed to further civilize themselves. It saw British rule as an agent of progress and as a mission. Many Indians in turn saw their salvation in becoming more like British, in friendship or in enmity. (2005: 7)

But the problem with Nandy's "identification with the aggressor" is that it refuses to see the complex position—in terms of history and social status—occupied by a particular community within a society. M. T. Ansari argues for a more complicated reading of self/other formation. He argues that Syed Ahmad's fashioning of 'self/other' must be

looked at keeping in mind the history of Muslim rule in India. According to Ansari, Syed Ahmad did not take the Western modernity verbatim, rather:

> What Syed Ahmad Khan set out to do was to initiate concrete and concerted moves to bring Islam into modernity, moves which exceed categorization as mimicry. Drawing on Islamic thought and heritage, he could postulate an engagement with modernity on terms other than those of the European modern. (M. T. Ansari 2005: 87-88)

It is this understanding of modernity which sets Syed Ahmad apart from Gandhi's notion of developing a 'self' by turning its back on modernity totally (M. T. Ansari 2005: 88).

There is another aspect to the colonized-colonizer camaraderie as envisioned in Syed Ahmad: social status. Just as the prototypes of the MAO College were for the landed gentry and they did not cater to the socially or economically poor sections in England; the same formula found its way in the MAO College too. If not economically, then the college was certainly out of bounds for lower castes—whether Hindu or Muslim. The founder members of the MAO College were all *ashraf* and they had no qualms about deciding for whom the college is meant. Syed Ahmad, who till 1872 was concerned about the question of education of all classes, had to give up his all-encompassing definition of *qaum*.[24] The *qaum* which earlier included all Muslims got restricted to the small class of *ashraf* or elite. Lelyveld points to the gap in speech and action of the founders of Aligarh, who "spoke in the name of all the Muslims of India, but offered a program designed to make contact with a considerably narrower group: the north Indian Muslim literate who formed the reservoir of Muslim intelligentsia and government servants" (123).[25] This gap can also be seen in the use of the geographical category 'Hindustan' by which they meant only the north and the western regions of India.

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[24] *qaum* denotes several meanings. It is generally used to refer to community but it also referred to the entire nation. There is no great discrepancy in this shift from a small community to a large community comprising nation as Benedict Anderson too calls nation as an 'imagined community'. But one has to be careful as when it is used to mean a small group of a large group.

[25] Hasan also notes the 'elitist' strain in Syed Ahmad (Hasan 2009a: 9).

But these paradoxes did not bother the founders of the College too much; rather they may never have registered it as such. They went about establishing and managing the College in the most pragmatic way. This pragmatism was clearly visible in Syed Ahmad's role in the running of the college. Syed Ahmad, despite his heartfelt concerns about religious education and its practice, had to bow out of the curriculum committee under public pressure (Lelyveld 131). He kept his activities confined to the management of the college such as raising funds and looking after the accounts, planning and supervising buildings, and corresponding and liaison with appropriate authorities (203). Again, the paradox is evident. Syed Ahmad, who wanted his students to interpret the *Quran* in the light of scientific rationality, had no say in any aspect of religious or secular curriculum. But the limit of Syed Ahmad's vision of the college is most marked in its role in Indian freedom movement, that is, its political nature. Syed Ahmad's non-political role for the college was turned on its head at the turn of the century. The following section discusses the role of the college in the national politics.

3.11 The MAO College and the National Politics

Syed Ahmad's vision for the MAO College was that of a non-political educational institution which works to strengthen the bonds between the British rulers and the Muslim community. As long as he was alive, he saw to it that the college remained away from any kind of political action. It was Syed Ahmed who himself took part in politics but his politics was not different from what the MAO College symbolized. Syed Ahmad opposed the formation of the Indian National Congress right from its inception and in 1886, formed his own Muhammadan Educational Congress as a rival group. He held the meeting of his own group at the same time of the annual conferences of Indian National Congress. In 1887 conference, he bitterly denounced the Indian National Congress and its

espousal of democracy and bureaucratic appointment on the basis of merit. Taking a conservative stand on the issue, he stated that appointments should be made on the basis of social position based on elite ancestry. Ability or merit cannot be accepted in a country such as India which lacks homogeneous political community (Lelyveld 307). Considering the lack of a homogeneous political community which Syed Ahmed bemoaned in the conference, the MAO College can be seen as an attempt in the formation of the same homogeneous political community. The question can be easily posed that howsoever protected the environment at the college may be, can the young men studying there remain unaffected by the strong currents of nationalism which were felt in the country from 1890 onwards. It was an ultimate reversal of Syed Ahmad's non-political vision about his college and its students when Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali participated in the Indian Independence Movement in 1920s and even more shockingly, they spearheaded the nation-wide movement for the restoration of Caliphate which Syed Ahmad was so much against. The history of the MAO College in the first two decades of the twentieth century and that of the Aligarh Muslim University thereafter is deeply entwined with the political history of India. Moreover, the MAO College spearheaded another fashioning of 'self' for the Muslim community which took on various shapes. It will be a complete denial of the political to lump even this fashioning of 'self' into a single category. Different individuals and groups responded to the national movement differently and in the process their own response to the category of the 'Muslim' was different.

This chapter sought to outline the how the idea of 'self' travelled throughout the life and work of Syed Ahmad. By his role as one of the leading Muslims of his time, Syed Ahmad's own formulation of the 'self' was deeply entangled with that of the Muslim community. In this way it was an exercise in the formation of a 'national subjectivity' for

the Muslim community. I have argued that it was ‘liberal education’ which structured the formation of the ‘national subjectivity’ in Syed Ahmad. During his travel and stay in England, Syed Ahmad understood liberal education to be the source of British greatness and he sought to establish a college on those principles of liberal education as found in Cambridge and Oxford universities. The establishment of the MAO College at Aligarh was a step in the direction of achieving such greatness for the *qaum*. Syed Ahmad sought the collaboration with the British as a tool for Muslim emancipation and for that collaboration he embraced colonial modernity which was a radical act for a Muslim of an aristocratic lineage. But as I have tried to argue in the chapter, this embracing of modernity was not uncritical for Syed Ahmad. Rather, he sought to use the tools of modernity to dig for resources within the Muslim tradition to launch a ‘self-critique’ of the degenerate contemporary Muslim society. I have also attempted a critique of the ‘liberal education’ as embodied in the MAO College by drawing attention to the inherent contradictions in the college, its curriculum and examination vis-à-vis the social and cultural background of its students.