

as well as in university governing bodies like the senate and syndicate. Second, they requested that Muslim representatives be elected separately to the Provincial Council, based on their political significance rather than their proportion of the population.

Sir Syed's ideas on the separate electorate were rooted in his broader vision for Muslim political representation and protection within the British colonial system. His idea of separate electorates for Muslims can be viewed as evolving from some of his political beliefs and concerns for the Muslim community. In Bengal, institutions like Islamia College followed Sir Syed's model of blending Western and Islamic education. Muslim intellectuals in Bengal, such as Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Ameer Ali, advocated for educational reform among Muslims in line with Sir Syed's liberal approach.

It is to be noted that the separate electorate for the Muslim community was formally recognised in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. Moreover, Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, two prominent leaders of the Khilafat Movement in the early 20th century, were both students at Aligarh Muslim University and were deeply influenced by Sir Syed's ideas on Muslim education and political awareness. The Ali brothers carried forward Sir Syed's emphasis on the importance of Muslim unity, although they were involved in the anti-colonial struggle, unlike Sir Syed's pro-British stance.

The constitutional recognition of the separate electorate for Muslims was a milestone in several important ways. First, the separate electorate facilitated the growth of a set of Muslim leaders such as Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq. The establishment of the University of Dacca in 1921 also had a significant impact on the promotion of Muslim culture and political consciousness. Several societies and periodicals came into existence. The demand for Muslim education created an enabling environment for the Freedom of Intellect Movement (Buddhir Mukti Andolan), a Bengali Muslim-led renaissance advocating rationality against religious fanaticism and social dogma in Bengali Muslim society. It was spearheaded by several Dacca University intellectuals, including Abul Husain, Abul Fazal, Qazi Motahar Hossain, and Abdul Quadir. *Shikha* was the mouthpiece of the Muslim Sahitya-Samaj (Muslim Literary Society), founded in Dhaka in 1926.

In his 1926 speech, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah stated: "The Hindu Shahitya is fed with Vedanta, Gita, Hindu history, and life. Hindu literature gathers flavours from Hindu

society. It is through this literature that the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal will recognise each other. Cognition is the basis of love" (Cited in Rahim, 2011: 219). The main slogan or motto of *Shikha* was: "Where knowledge is limited, intellect is inert, freedom is impossible."

Second, the separate electorate expanded job opportunities and improved the economic well-being of Muslims. It eventually contributed to the political ascendancy of A. K. Fazlul Huq, who became the Chief Minister of undivided Bengal after the 1937 elections. Huq formed the Krishak Praja Party for the betterment of the peasants and abolished the exploitative zamindari system. Once, in the 1940s, A. K. Fazlul Huq called upon the people not to apologise for being Muslims (Rashiduzzaman, 2021).

Third, the rise of the Muslim middle class was the cumulative outcome of the historical awakening and empowerment of the Muslims. The masses belonging to the rural and urban middle classes played key roles in the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. Thus, Syed Ahmad's influence extended beyond his lifetime, with his ideas continuing to resonate during the struggle for independence. He inspired later political leaders, including those involved in the formation of the All-India Muslim League, a party established in 1906, following the partition of Bengal, which played a significant role in the demand for Pakistan.

However, the main domestic problem of separate electorates was addressed when Congress agreed to Jinnah's plea to allow weightage of seats in the legislative councils of certain provinces where Muslims were in the minority. This became known as the historic Lucknow Pact, which made Jinnah a prominent leader of Indian Muslims. The atmosphere in Lucknow, where the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress met to hold their annual sessions, was even more cordial. Jinnah was the main architect of the Lucknow Pact, and he was thereafter hailed as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Lucknow Pact acknowledged the provision of separate electorates, which was later incorporated into the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919.

In this way, we learn that the separate electorate system was introduced by the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, recognised by the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1919, and further extended by the Government of India Act of 1935. All the elections to the local bodies and Legislative Councils from 1909

to 1946 were held on the basis of the separate electorate system.

It is important to note that the ideology of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was subject to criticism and limitation. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) was a scholar, freedom fighter, and proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity. A close reading of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's autobiography, *India Wins Freedom*, reveals that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had a decisive influence on Azad. Sir Syed's emphasis on rationalism, scientific inquiry, and social reform significantly shaped Azad's worldview. Azad was inspired by Sir Syed's calls for a modern and progressive interpretation of Islam, advocating for reforms within Muslim society to align with contemporary realities. As Azad wrote, "Suddenly a new way opened before me. I refer to the writings of Sir Sayyid [Syed Ahmad Khan]. Because this experience had a very great influence on my religious and intellectual life" (Cited in Douglas, 1988: 51).

Although Azad recognised Sir Syed's contribution to Muslim education, he disagreed with many of his views. Maulana Azad believed that Sir Syed's policy of loyalty to the British Empire was shortsighted and flawed. Azad argued that this stance diminished the role Muslims could play in the larger Indian freedom movement. He believed that Muslims, like Hindus, should oppose colonial rule, which he viewed as unjust and exploitative. To Azad, aligning too closely with the British harmed the political future of Indian Muslims.

In conclusion, this paper reiterates its central thesis that, as a visionary political leader and socio-religious reformer of the 19th century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan played a vital role in empowering Muslims through the enlightening efforts of his Aligarh Movement. He recognised the importance of English education in empowering Muslims and fostering fruitful interactions with the British ruling elite. While Sir Syed's efforts to modernise Muslim education and social thought had a lasting impact, his critics argue that his loyalty to the British colonial government, his communal outlook, and his elitist approach to education contributed to a fractured Muslim identity. He was an early advocate of the separate electorate for the Muslim community. The demand for and recognition of the separate electorate in 1909 ignited a crucial debate among anti-colonial nationalists, as well as within the Pakistan Movement, ultimately leading to the emergence of two independent states, namely India and Pakistan, in 1947. In a nutshell, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a key figure



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